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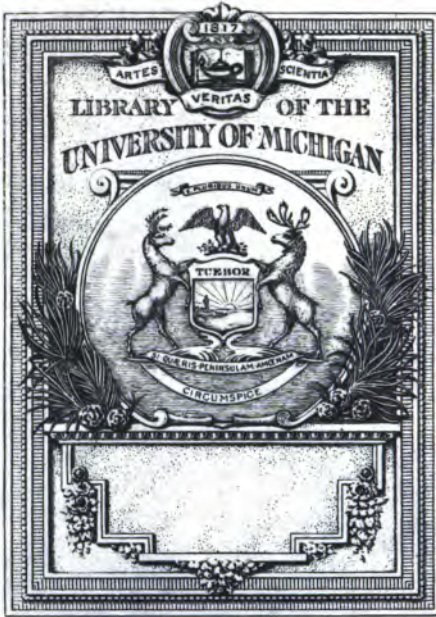
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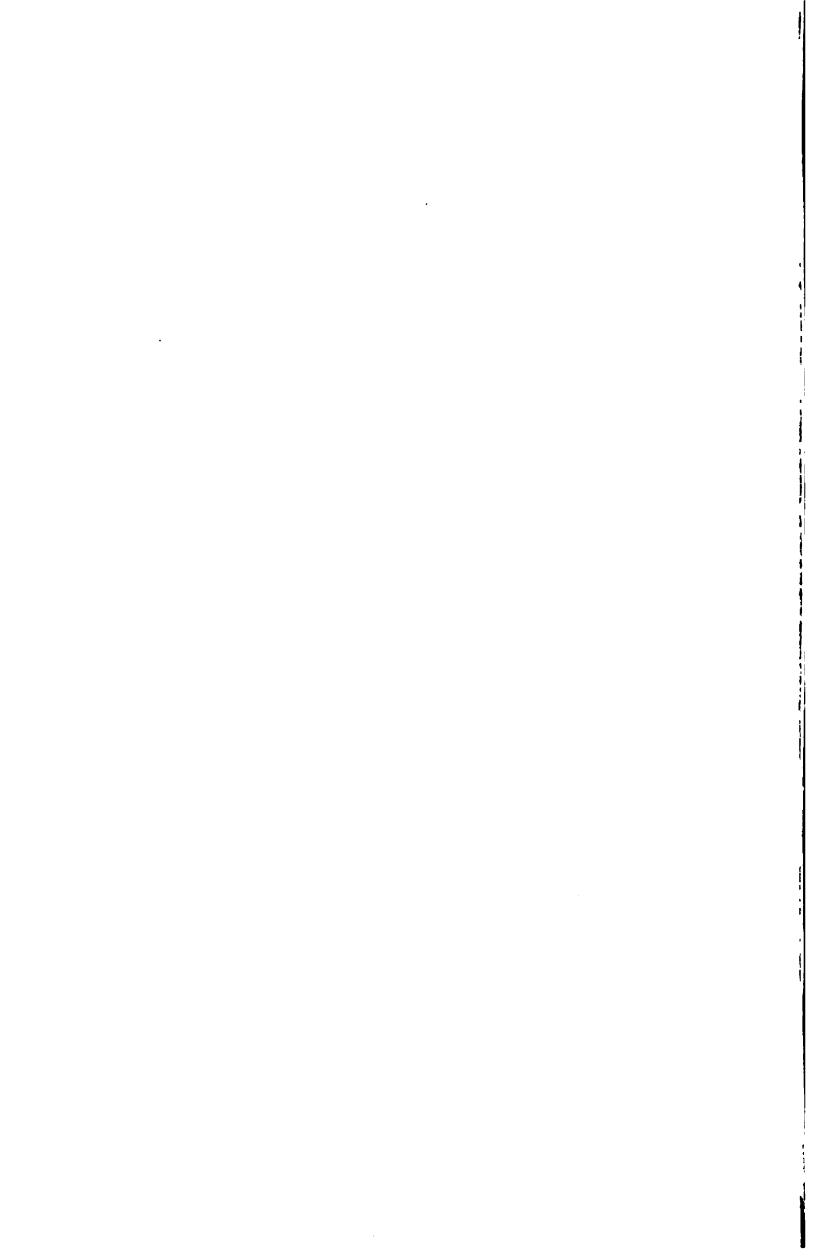
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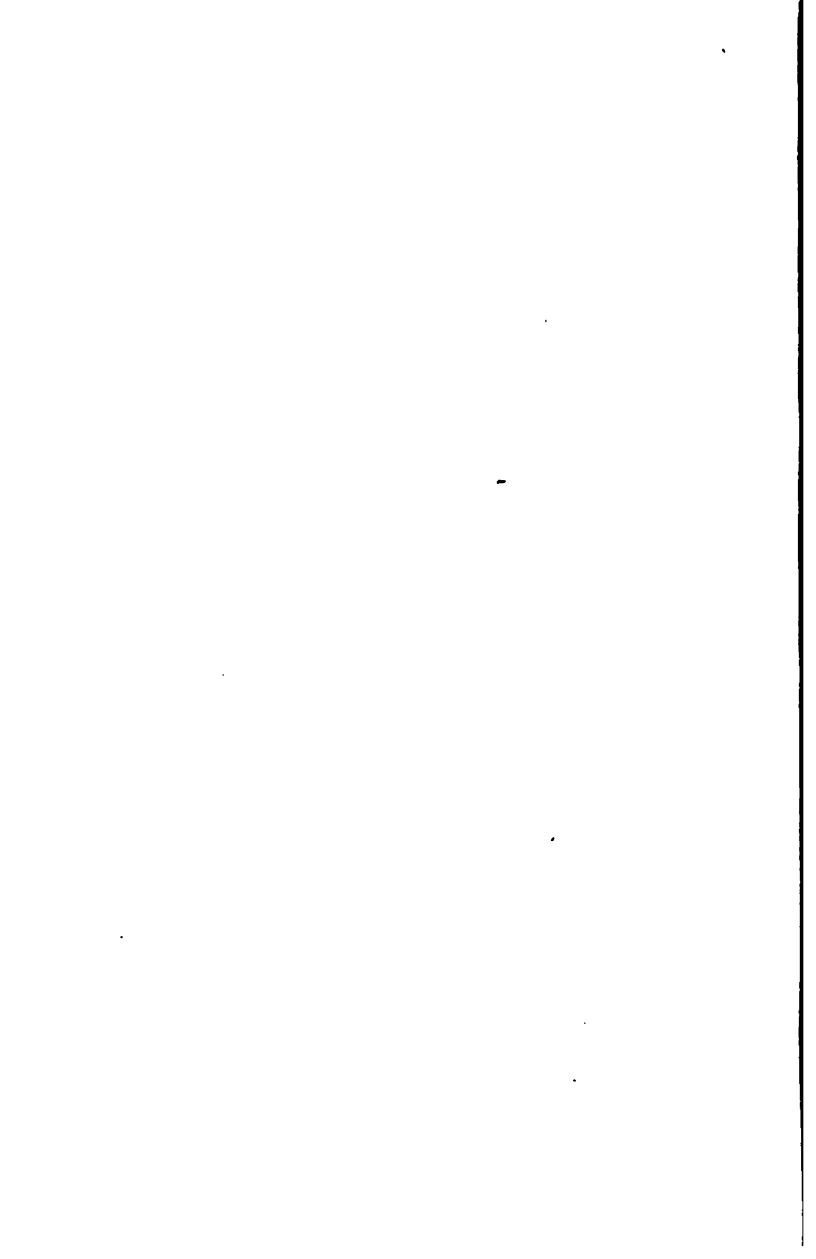
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# ST. JOHN IN THE DESERT



Oxford

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*Browning, Robert*

# St. John in the Desert

*AN INTRODUCTION AND NOTES TO*

**BROWNING'S**

**'A DEATH IN THE DESERT'**

BY THE

REV. G. U. POPE, M.A., D.D.

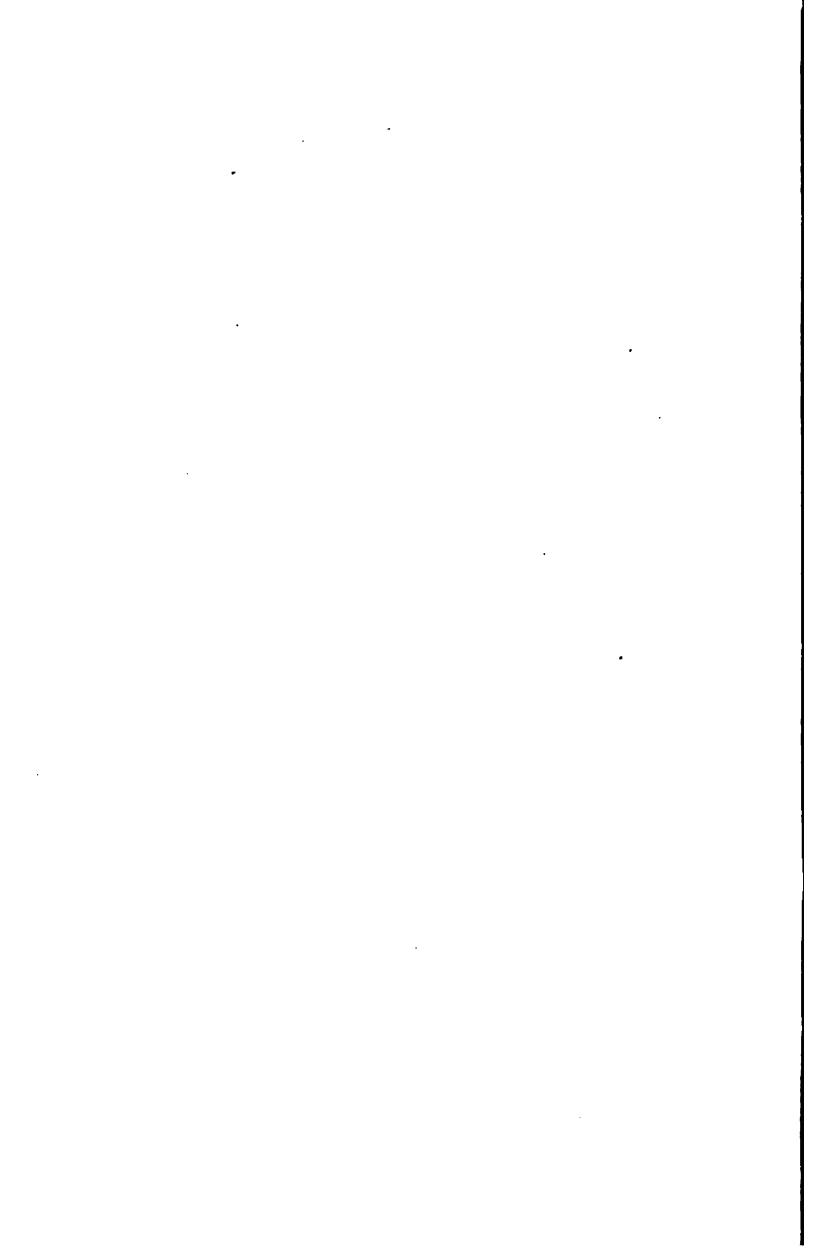
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## PREFACE

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THE aim of these pages, written at the request of some former pupils, is to help beginners in the study of a poem full of valuable suggestive teaching—never more needed than now. Some intercourse—too soon interrupted—with the poet seemed to show the present writer that this work (with *Saul, Christmas Eve and Easter Day*) did really unlock the great master's soul. Mrs. Sutherland Orr, in her *Life of Browning*, is surely too definite in her conclusions regarding this very delicate subject.

These notes of lectures simply contain answers to questions proposed by learners at one time or another. Some students need more help than others; these pages are for the merest beginners.

I take this opportunity of thanking Mr. R. Barrett-Browning for his permission to reprint this poem.

Several valuable monographs have been written on *A Death in the Desert*. One by Mrs. M. G. Glazebrook, in Dr. Berdoe's *Browning Studies*, is especially

interesting. There is some divergence in the views taken of the 'mythic' question. Browning, with whom was never any 'doubt or despondency,' at no period swerved (I feel happy in thinking) from the essential faith implied in the close of the *Epistle* of Karshish—the faith of St. John the Divine:

The very God! . . . . .  
 So, the All-Great, were the All-Loving too—  
 So, through the thunder comes a human voice  
 Saying, 'O heart I made, a heart beats here!  
 Face, My hands fashioned, see it in Myself!  
 Thou hast no power nor may'st conceive of Mine:  
 But love I gave thee, with Myself to love,  
 And thou must love Me Who have died for thee!'

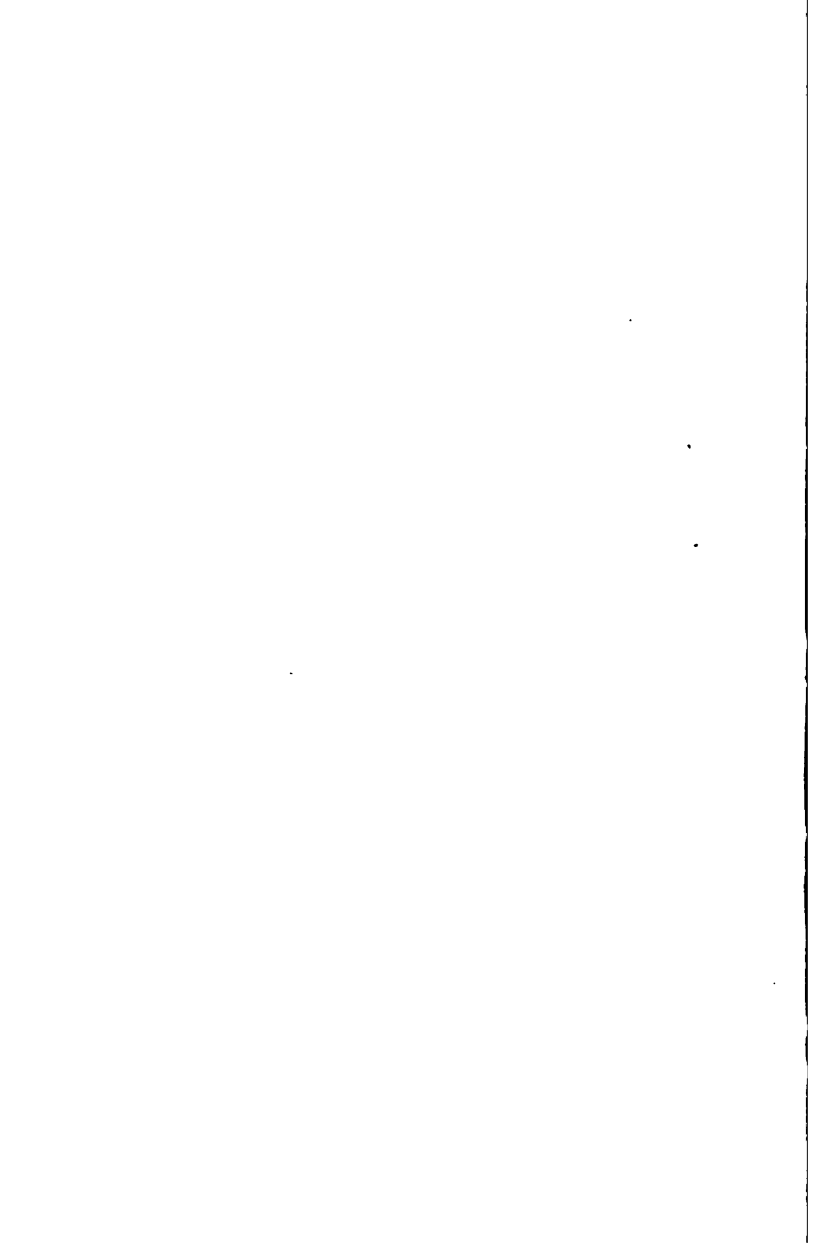
G. U. POPE.

OXFORD. *June*, 1897.

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# A DEATH IN THE DESERT

## TEXT AND NOTES.

[*Prologue. In the Library.*]

(SUPPOSED of Pamphylax the Antiochene :  
It is a parchment, of my rolls the fifth,  
Hath three skins glued together, is all Greek,  
And goeth from *Epsilon* down to *Mu* :  
Lies second in the surnamed Chosen Chest, 5  
Stained and conserved with juice of terebinth,  
Covered with cloth of hair, and lettered *Xi*,  
From Xanthus, my wife's uncle, now at peace :  
*Mu* and *Epsilon* stand for my own name,  
I may not write it, but I make a cross 10  
To show I wait His coming, with the rest,  
And leave off here : beginneth Pamphylax.)

1. This is the label of the MS.: 'A MS. supposed to have been written by Pamphylax of Antioch'—an imaginary person, as are Xanthus, Valens, the Bactrian, and the boy.

2. *my*: the anonymous owner.

4. *Epsilon* ( $\epsilon$ ) is the fifth letter in the Greek alphabet = E.

*Mu* ( $\mu$ ) the twelfth letter = M.

7. *Xi* ( $\xi$ ) = X, the fourteenth of the Greek letters.

11. The daily expectation of Christ's second coming was an especial note of the early Church—677, 8.



[*In the midmost grotto.*]

I said, 'If one should wet his lips with wine,  
 'And slip the broadest plantain-leaf we find,  
 'Or else the lappet of a linen robe, 15  
 'Into the water-vessel, lay it right,  
 'And cool his forehead just above the eyes,  
 'The while a brother, kneeling either side,  
 'Should chafe each hand and try to make it warm,—  
 'He is not so far gone but he might speak.' 20

This did not happen in the outer cave,  
 Nor in the secret chamber of the rock,  
 Where, sixty days since the decree was out,  
 We had him, bedded on a camel-skin,  
 And waited for his dying all the while; 25  
 But in the midmost grotto: since noon's light  
 Reached there a little, and we would not lose  
 The last of what might happen on his face.

I at the head, and Xanthus at the feet,  
 With Valens and the Boy, had lifted him, 30  
 And brought him from the chamber in the depths,  
 And laid him in the light where we might see:  
 For certain smiles began about his mouth,  
 And his lips moved, presageful of the end.

13. Pamphylax speaks. The MS. begins abruptly. The history of the preceding details was in the missing sections A to D.

*his*—no name is given—St. John's.

23. The decree of Trajan.

30. *Valens*. See 49, 72, 648.

*The Boy*, 58, 74.

[*Outside the cave.*]

Beyond, and half way up the mouth o' the cave, 35  
 The Bactrian convert, having his desire,  
 Kept watch, and made pretence to graze a goat  
 That gave us milk, on rags of various herb,  
 Plantain and quitch, the rocks' shade keeps alive:  
 So that if any thief or soldier passed, 40  
 (Because the persecution was aware)  
 Yielding the goat up promptly with his life,  
 Such man might pass on, joyful at a prize,  
 Nor care to pry into the cool o' the cave.  
 Outside was all noon and the burning blue. 45

[*They try to rouse the dying Apostle.*]

'Here is wine,' answered Xanthus,—dropped a drop;  
 I stooped and placed the lap of cloth aright,  
 Then chafed his right hand, and the Boy his left:  
 But Valens had bethought him, and produced  
 And broke a ball of nard, and made perfume. 50  
 Only, he did—not so much wake, as—turn  
 And smile a little, as a sleeper does

36. See 68, 649.

39. Or *quitch*. Quitch (i.e. *quitch*) grass, a kind of desert creeping-grass, very tenacious of life. The same as 'couch-grass.'

41. *aware* = 'on the alert.'

42, 3. (He) *yielding*, i.e. the Bactrian. Choriambus. App. III. This corresponds to Latin abl. abs.

45. Outside was all noon | and the burning blue.

46. 'Here is wine,' | answer'd Xanthus,— | dropp'd a drop.

50. St. John xii. 3.

51-54. App. I, Simile 1.

If any dear one call him, touch his face—  
 And smiles and loves, but will not be disturbed.  
 Then Xanthus said a prayer, but still he slept: 55  
 (It is the Xanthus that escaped to Rome,  
 Was burned, and could not write the chronicle.)

[*The tablet.*]

Then the Boy sprang up from his knees, and ran,  
 Stung by the splendour of a sudden thought,  
 And fetched the seventh plate of graven lead 60  
 Out of the secret chamber, found a place,  
 Pressing with finger on the deeper dints,  
 And spoke, as 'twere his mouth proclaiming first  
 'I am the Resurrection and the Life.'

[*The revival.*]

Whereat he opened his eyes wide at once, 65  
 And sat up of himself, and looked at us;  
 And thenceforth nobody pronounced a word:  
 Only, outside, the Bactrian cried his cry  
 Like the lone desert-bird that wears the ruff,  
 As signal we were safe, from time to time. 70

First he said, 'If a friend declared to me,  
 'This my son Valens, this my other son,  
 'Were James and Peter,—nay, declared as well

64. St. John xi. 25.

65. Hard to read.

(?) Whereat he open'd his eyes | wide at once.

∪ - | ∪ - | ∪ ∪ - | - ∪ -

' This lad was very John,—I could believe !  
 ' —Could, for a moment, doubtlessly believe ! 75  
 ' So is myself withdrawn into my depths,  
 ' The soul retreated from the perished brain  
 ' Whence it was wont to feel and use the world  
 ' Through these dull members, done with long ago.  
 ' Yet I myself remain ; I feel myself : 80  
 ' And there is nothing lost. Let be, awhile ! '

[ *The three souls.* ]

(This is the doctrine he was wont to teach,  
 How divers persons witness in each man,  
 Three souls which make up one soul : first, to wit,  
 A soul of each and all the bodily parts, 85  
 Seated therein, which works, and is what Does,  
 And has the use of earth, and ends the man  
 Downward : but tending upward for advice,  
 Grows into, and again is grown into  
 By the next soul, which, seated in the brain, 90  
 Useth the first with its collected use,  
 And feeleth, thinketh, willeth,—is what Knows :  
 Which, duly tending upward in its turn,  
 Grows into, and again is grown into  
 By the last soul, that uses both the first, 95  
 Subsisting whether they assist or no,  
 And, constituting man's self, is what Is—  
 And leans upon the former, makes it play,

85-100. Comp. 1 Thess. v. 23.

97. And, | constitúting mán's self, | is what is.

As that played off the first: and, tending up,  
 Holds, is upheld by, God, and ends the man 100  
 Upward in that dread point of intercourse,  
 Nor needs a place, for it returns to Him,  
 What Does, what Knows, what Is; three souls, one  
 man.

I give the glossa of Theotypas.)

[*His decrepitude.*]

And then, 'A stick, once fire from end to end; 105  
 'Now, ashes save the tip that holds a spark!  
 'Yet, blow the spark, it runs back, spreads itself  
 'A little where the fire was: thus I urge  
 'The soul that served me, till it task once more  
 'What ashes of my brain have kept their shape, 110  
 'And these make effort on the last o' the flesh,  
 'Trying to taste again the truth of things—'  
 (He smiled)—'their very superficial truth;  
 'As that ye are my sons, that it is long  
 'Since James and Peter had release by death, 115  
 'And I am only he, your brother John,  
 'Who saw and heard, and could remember all.  
 'Remember all! It is not much to say.

105. Comp. 'First he said,' 71-81; 'and then,' 105-642. Some words are to be supplied: 'Take a stick, &c.' This is the *second simile*, App. I, 2.

115. St. James, brother of St. John, was the first of the Apostles to die (Acts xii. 2, A.D. 62), as the brother was the last. St. Peter died probably about A.D. 67.

116, 125. Rev. i. 9.

117, 118. Comp. 208.

'What if the truth broke on me from above  
 'As once and oft-times? Such might hap again: 120  
 'Doubtlessly He might stand in presence here,  
 'With head wool-white, eyes, flame, and feet like  
     brass,  
 'The sword and the seven stars, as I have seen—  
 'I who now shudder only and surmise  
 "'How did your brother bear that sight and live?" 125

[*The only surviving witness.*]

'If I live yet, it is for good, more love  
 'Through me to men: be nought but ashes here  
 'That keep awhile my semblance, who was John,—  
 'Still, when they scatter, there is left on earth  
 'No one alive who knew (consider this!) 130  
 'Saw with his eyes and handled with his hands  
 'That which was from the first, the Word of Life.  
 'How will it be when none more, saith, "I saw" ?

[*His ministry. Patmos.*]

'Such ever was love's way: to rise, it stoops.  
 'Since I, whom Christ's mouth taught, was bidden  
     teach, 135  
 'I went, for many years, about the world,  
 'Saying, "It was so; so I heard and saw."  
 'Speaking as the case asked: and men believed.

122. Rev. i. 14-16.

125. Rev. i. 17.

131. 1 St. John i. 1.

'Afterward came the message to myself  
 'In Patmos isle; I was not bidden teach, 140  
 'But simply listen, take a book and write,  
 'Nor set down other than the given word,  
 'With nothing left to my arbitrament  
 'To choose or change: I wrote, and men believed.

[*His epistles. Antichrists.*]

'Then, for my time grew brief, no message more, 145  
 'No call to write again, I found a way,  
 'And, reasoning from my knowledge, merely taught  
 'Men should, for love's sake, in love's strength, believe;  
 'Or I would pen a letter to a friend  
 'And urge the same as friend, nor less nor more: 150  
 'Friends said I reasoned rightly, and believed.  
 'But at the last, why, I seemed left alive  
 'Like a sea-jelly weak on Patmos strand,  
 'To tell dry sea-beach gazers how I fared  
 'When there was mid-sea, and the mighty things; 155  
 'Left to repeat, "I saw, I heard, I knew,"  
 'And go all over the old ground again,  
 'With Antichrist already in the world,  
 'And many Antichrists, who answered prompt  
 '"Am I not Jasper as thyself art John? 160  
 '"Nay, young, whereas through age thou mayest forget:  
 '"Wherefore, explain, or how shall we believe?"

140. Rev. i. 9.

141. Rev. i. 11; xxii. 18.

152-157. App. I, Simile 3.

158. 1 St. John ii. 18; iv. 2, 3. 2 St. John 7.

[*His Gospel.*]

' I never thought to call down fire on such,  
 ' Or, as in wonderful and early days,  
 ' Pick up the scorpion, tread the serpent dumb;     165  
 ' But patient stated much of the Lord's life  
 ' Forgotten or misdelivered, and let it work :  
 ' Since much that at the first, in deed and word,  
 ' Lay simply and sufficiently exposed,  
 ' Had grown (or else my soul was grown to match, 170  
 ' Fed through such years, familiar with such light,  
 ' Guarded and guided still to see and speak)  
 ' Of new significance and fresh result ;  
 ' What first were guessed as points, I now knew stars,  
 ' And named them in the Gospel I have writ.     175  
 ' For men said, " It is getting long ago :"  
 ' " Where is the promise of His coming ?"—asked  
 ' These young ones in their strength, as loth to wait,  
 ' Of me who, when their sires were born, was old.  
 ' I, for I loved them, answered, joyfully,     180  
 ' Since I was there, and helpful in my age ;  
 ' And, in the main, I think such men believed.

[*Sick and dying.*]

' Finally, thus endeavouring, I fell sick,  
 ' Ye brought me here, and I supposed the end,

163-165. St. Luke ix. 54; x. 19.

167. Fòrgótt'n òr mís-dèlìvèr'd, ànd lét it wórk. 332.

176. 2 St. Peter iii. 4.



' And went to sleep with one thought that, at least, 185  
 ' Though the whole earth should lie in wickedness,  
 ' We had the truth, might leave the rest to God.  
 ' Yet now I wake in such decrepitude  
 ' As I had slidden down and fallen afar,  
 ' Past even the presence of my former self, 190  
 ' Grasping the while for stay at facts which snap,  
 ' Till I am found away from my own world,  
 ' Feeling for foot-hold through a blank profound,  
 ' Along with unborn people in strange lands,  
 ' Who say—I hear said or conceive they say— 195  
 ' "Was John at all, and did he say he saw?  
 ' "Assure us, ere we ask what he might see!"

[*How age and experience teach.*]

' And how shall I assure them? Can they share  
 ' —They, who have flesh, a veil of youth and strength  
 ' About each spirit, that needs must bide its time, 200  
 ' Living and learning still as years assist  
 ' Which wear the thickness thin, and let man see—  
 ' With me who hardly am withheld at all,  
 ' But shudderingly, scarce a shred between,  
 ' Lie bare to the universal prick of light? 205  
 ' Is it for nothing we grow old and weak,  
 ' We whom God loves? When pain ends, gain ends too.

[*How he apprehended it.*]

' To me, that story—ay, that Life and Death  
 ' Of which I wrote "it was"—to me, it is;

'—Is, here and now : I apprehend nought else. 210  
 ' Is not God now i' the world His power first made ?  
 ' Is not His love at issue still with sin,  
 ' Visibly when a wrong is done on earth ?  
 ' Love, wrong, and pain, what see I else around ?  
 ' Yea, and the Resurrection and Uprise 215  
 ' To the right hand of the throne—what is it beside,  
 ' When such truth, breaking bounds, o'erfloods my soul,  
 ' And, as I saw the sin and death, even so  
 ' See I the need yet transiency of both,  
 ' The good and glory consummated thence ? 220  
 ' I saw the Power ; I see the Love, once weak,  
 ' Resume the Power : and in this word " I see,"  
 ' Lo, there is recognized the Spirit of both,  
 ' That moving o'er the spirit of man, unblinds  
 ' His eye and bids him look.

[*The optic glass.*]

These are, I see ; 225

' But ye, the children, His beloved ones too,  
 ' Ye need,—as I should use an optic glass  
 ' I wondered at erewhile, somewhere i' the world,  
 ' It had been given a crafty smith to make ;  
 ' A tube, he turned on objects brought too close, 230  
 ' Lying confusedly insubordinate  
 ' For the unassisted eye to master once :  
 ' Look through his tube, at distance now they lay,  
 ' Become succinct, distinct, so small, so clear !

' Just thus, ye needs must apprehend what truth 235  
 ' I see, reduced to plain historic fact,  
 ' Diminished into clearness, proved a point  
 ' And far away: ye would withdraw your sense  
 ' From out eternity, strain it upon time,  
 ' Then stand before that fact, that Life and Death 240  
 ' Stay there at gaze, till it dispart, dispread,  
 ' As though a star should open out, all sides,  
 ' Grow the world on you, as it is my world.

[*The lesson of life.*]

' Our life, with all it yields of joy and woe,  
 ' And hope and fear,—believe the aged friend,— 245  
 ' Is just our chance o' the prize of learning love,  
 ' How love might be, hath been indeed, and is ;  
 ' And that we hold thenceforth to the uttermost  
 ' Such prize despite the envy of the world,  
 ' And, having gained truth, keep truth: that is all. 250  
 ' But see the double way wherein we are led,  
 ' How the soul learns diversely from the flesh !  
 ' With flesh, that hath so little time to stay,  
 ' And yields mere basement for the soul's emprise,  
 ' Expect prompt teaching. Helpful was the light, 255

236. Comp. Tennyson's *In Memoriam*, xxv :

' The past will always win  
 A glory from its being far ;  
 And orb into the perfect star  
 We saw not, when we moved therein.'

239. Qu. for *upon* read *on*.

244. App. II, Simile 2.

248. How love might be, | hath been indeed, | and is.

'And warmth was cherishing and food was choice  
 'To every man's flesh, thousand years ago,  
 'As now to yours and mine; the body sprang  
 'At once to the height, and stayed: but the soul,—no!  
 'Since sages who, this noontide, meditate 260  
 'In Rome or Athens, may descry some point  
 'Of the eternal power, hid yester-eve:  
 'And, as thereby the power's whole mass extends,  
 'So much extends the aether floating o'er  
 'The love that tops the might, the Christ in God. 265  
 'Then, as new lessons shall be learned in these  
 'Till earth's work stop and useless time run out,  
 'So duly, daily, needs provision be  
 'For keeping the soul's prowess possible,  
 'Building new barriers as the old decay, 270  
 'Saving us from evasion of life's proof,  
 'Putting the question ever, "Does God love,  
 '"And will ye hold that truth against the world?"

[*Experience of its worth.*]

'Ye know there needs no second proof with good  
 'Gained for our flesh from any earthly source: 275  
 'We might go freezing, ages,—give us fire,  
 'Thereafter we judge fire at its full worth,  
 'And guard it safe through every chance, ye know!  
 'That fable of Prometheus and his theft,

257. Το év'ry mán's flesh. . . .

279. App. I, Simile 6. Son of Iapetus, the Titan.

'How mortals gained Jove's fiery flower, grows old  
 ' (I have been used to hear the pagans own) 281  
 'And out of mind; but fire, howe'er its birth,  
 'Here is it, precious to the sophist now  
 'Who laughs the myth of Aeschylus to scorn,  
 'As precious to those satyrs of his play, 285  
 'Who touched it in gay wonder at the thing.  
 'While were it so with the soul,—this gift of truth  
 'Once grasped, were this our soul's gain safe, and sure  
 'To prosper as the body's gain is wont,—  
 'Why, man's probation would conclude, his earth 290  
 'Crumble; for he both reasons and decides,  
 'Weighs first, then chooses: will he give up fire  
 'For gold or purple once he knows its worth?  
 'Could he give Christ up were His worth as plain?  
 'Therefore, I say, to test man, the proofs shift, 295  
 'Nor may he grasp that fact like other fact,  
 'And straightway in his life acknowledge it,  
 'As, say, the indubitable bliss of fire.

[*Each age has its tests for faith.*]

'Sigh ye, "It had been easier once than now" ?  
 'To give you answer I am left alive; 300  
 'Look at me who was present from the first!  
 'Ye know what things I saw; then came a test,  
 'My first, befitting me who so had seen:

280. Aeschylus, *Prom.* 7: Τὸ σὸν ἄθος.

285. App. I, Simile 6.

287. While were it só with *th'* soul. *The* is really elided.

‘ “ Forsake the Christ thou sawest transfigured, Him  
 ‘ “ Who trod the sea and brought the dead to life? 305  
 ‘ “ What should wring this from thee?”—ye laugh and  
 ask.  
 ‘ What wrung it? Even a torchlight and a noise,  
 ‘ The sudden Roman faces, violent hands,  
 ‘ And fear of what the Jews might do! Just that,  
 ‘ And it is written, “I forsook and fled”; 310  
 ‘ There was my trial, and it ended thus.  
 ‘ Ay, but my soul had gained its truth, could grow:  
 ‘ Another year or two,—what little child,  
 ‘ What tender woman that had seen no least  
 ‘ Of all my sights, but barely heard them told, 315  
 ‘ Who did not clasp the cross with a light laugh,  
 ‘ Or wrap the burning robe round, thanking God?

[*False doctrine.*]

‘ Well, was truth safe for ever, then? Not so,  
 ‘ Already had begun the silent work  
 ‘ Whereby truth, deadened of its absolute blaze, 320  
 ‘ Might need love’s eye to pierce the o’erstretched  
 doubt.  
 ‘ Teachers were busy, whispering “All is true  
 ‘ “As the aged ones report; but youth can reach  
 ‘ “Where age gropes dimly, weak with stir and strain,  
 ‘ “And the full doctrine slumbers till to-day.” 325

310. St. Mark xiv. 50.

321. The light of truth which blazed out in that first age of enthusiastic realization of the power of the Spirit grew dimmer.

' Thus, what the Roman's lowered spear was found,  
 ' A bar to me who touched and handled truth,  
 ' Now proved the glozing of some new shrewd tongue,  
 ' This Ebion, this Cerinthus or their mates,  
 ' Till imminent was the outcry "Save our Christ!" 330  
 ' Whereon I stated much of the Lord's life  
 ' Forgotten or misdelivered, and let it work.

[*The Apostle's experience may lighten the burthen of the after-time.*]

' Such work done, as it will be, what comes next?  
 ' What do I hear say, or conceive men say,  
 ' "Was John at all, and did he say he saw?" 335  
 ' "Assure us, ere we ask what he might see!"  
 ' Is this indeed a burthen for late days,  
 ' And may I help to bear it with you all,  
 ' Using my weakness which becomes your strength?

[*A simile.*]

' For if a babe were born inside this grot, 340  
 ' Grew to a boy here, heard us praise the sun,  
 ' Yet had but yon sole glimmer in light's place,—  
 ' One loving him and wishful he should learn,  
 ' Would much rejoice himself was blinded first

326-8. The glozing proved to be, in their case, what the Roman's lowered spear was found to be in my case—a bar (*obstacle, hindrance, difficulty*), although I had touched and handled truth.

332. Line 167.

335, 6. Lines 196, 7.

340-349. See App. I, Simile 7.

340. Line 26.

344. Rejoice that.

' Month by month here, so made to understand 345  
 ' How eyes, born darkling, apprehend amiss :  
 ' I think I could explain to such a child  
 ' There was more glow outside than gleams he caught,  
 ' Ay, nor need urge "I saw it, so believe!"

[*The men of after-days.*]

' It is a heavy burthen you shall bear 350  
 ' In latter days, new lands, or old grown strange,  
 ' Left without me, which must be very soon.  
 ' What is the doubt, my brothers? Quick with it!  
 ' I see you stand conversing, each new face,  
 ' Either in fields, of yellow summer eves, 355  
 ' On islets yet unnamed amid the sea ;  
 ' Or pace for shelter 'neath a portico  
 ' Out of the crowd in some enormous town  
 ' Where now the larks sing in a solitude ;  
 ' Or muse upon blank heaps of stone and sand 360  
 ' Idly conjectured to be Ephesus ;  
 ' And no one asks his fellow any more  
 ' "Where is the promise of His coming?" but  
 ' "Was He revealed in any of His lives,  
 ' "As Power, as Love, as Influencing Soul?" 365

345. And so made.

347. Explain—that (or how) there was.

349. Elaborate argument would not be needed. My bare testimony, and the 'gleam,' would suffice to convince.

355. *of* = on. Time, 'yellow summer eves.' Place, 'fields on islets, &c.'

363. See 176-179.



[*Objections. 'Religion is merely subjective and anthropomorphic.'*]

'Quick, for time presses, tell the whole mind out,  
 'And let us ask and answer and be saved!  
 'My book speaks on, because it cannot pass;  
 'One listens quietly, nor scoffs but pleads  
 "'Here is a tale of things done ages since; 370  
 "'What truth was ever told the second day?  
 "'Wonders, that would prove doctrine, go for nought.  
 "'Remains the doctrine, love; well, we must love,  
 "'And what we love most, power and love in one,  
 "'Let us acknowledge on the record here, 375  
 "'Accepting these in Christ: must Christ then be?  
 "'Has He been? Did not we ourselves make Him?  
 "'Our mind receives but what it holds, no more.  
 "'First of the love, then; we acknowledge Christ—  
 "'A proof we comprehend His love, a proof 380  
 "'We had such love already in ourselves,  
 "'Knew first what else we should not recognize.  
 "'T is mere projection from man's inmost mind,  
 "'And, what he loves, thus falls reflected back,  
 "'Becomes accounted somewhat out of him; 385  
 "'He throws it up in air, it drops down earth's,  
 "'With shape, name, story added, man's old way.  
 "'How prove you Christ came otherwise at least?  
 "'Next try the power: He made and rules the world:  
 "'Certes there is a world once made, now ruled, 390

373. 'The real teaching, which is LOVE, remains.'

- ‘ “ Unless things have been ever as we see.  
 ‘ “ Our sires declared a charioteer’s yoked steeds  
 ‘ “ Brought the sun up the east and down the west,  
 ‘ “ Which only of itself now rises, sets,  
 ‘ “ As if a hand impelled it and a will,— 395  
 ‘ “ Thus they long thought, they who had will and  
     hands :  
 ‘ “ But the new question’s whisper is distinct,  
 ‘ “ Wherefore must all force needs be like ourselves ?  
 ‘ “ We have the hands, the will ; what made and drives  
 ‘ “ The sun is force, is law, is named, not known, 400  
 ‘ “ While will and love we do know ; marks of these,  
 ‘ “ Eye-witnesses attest, so books declare—  
 ‘ “ As that, to punish or reward our race,  
 ‘ “ The sun at undue times arose or set  
 ‘ “ Or else stood still : what do not men affirm ? 405  
 ‘ “ But earth requires as urgently reward  
 ‘ “ Or punishment to-day as years ago,  
 ‘ “ And none expects the sun will interpose :  
 ‘ “ Therefore it was mere passion and mistake,  
 ‘ “ Or erring zeal for right, which changed the truth. 410  
 ‘ “ Go back, far, farther, to the birth of things ;  
 ‘ “ Ever the will, the intelligence, the love,  
 ‘ “ Man’s !—which he gives, supposing he but finds,  
 ‘ “ As late he gave head, body, hands and feet,  
 ‘ “ To help these in what forms he called his gods. 415  
 ‘ “ First, Jove’s brow, Juno’s eyes were swept away,  
 ‘ “ But Jove’s wrath, Juno’s pride continued long !

396. So all religion is simply anthropomorphism.

- ‘“ At last, will, power, and love discarded these,  
 ‘“ So law in turn discards power, love, and will.  
 ‘“ What proveth God is otherwise at least? 420  
 ‘“ All else, projection from the mind of man!”

[*Answer to assertion that all religion is merely subjective.*]

- ‘ Nay, do not give me wine, for I am strong,  
 ‘ But place my gospel where I put my hands.  
  
 ‘ I say that man was made to grow, not stop ;  
 ‘ That help, he needed once, and needs no more, 425  
 ‘ Having grown but an inch by, is withdrawn :  
 ‘ For he hath new deeds, and new helps to these.  
 ‘ This imports solely, man should mount on each  
 ‘ New height in view ; the help whereby he mounts,  
 ‘ The ladder-rung his foot has left, may fall, 430  
 ‘ Since all things suffer change save God the Truth.  
 ‘ Man apprehends Him newly at each stage  
 ‘ Whereat earth’s ladder drops, its service done ;  
 ‘ And nothing shall prove twice what once was proved.  
 ‘ You stick a garden-plot with ordered twigs 435  
 ‘ To show inside lie germs of herbs unborn,  
 ‘ And check the careless step would spoil their birth ;  
  
 430. ‘ And why count steps through eternity ?  
       But love is the ever-springing fountain :  
       Man may enlarge or narrow his bed  
       For the water’s play, but the water-head—  
       How can he multiply or reduce it ?’ *Christmas Eve*, v.  
 431. ‘ Earth changes, but thy soul and God stand sure.’  
 434. God gives us no second proof of what has once been taught !  
 435. App. I, Simile 8.

' But when herbs wave, the guardian twigs may go,  
 ' Since should ye doubt of virtues, question kinds,  
 ' It is no longer for old twigs ye look, 440  
 ' Which proved once underneath lay store of seed,  
 ' But to the herb's self, by what light ye boast,  
 ' For what fruit's signs are. This book's fruit is plain,  
 ' Nor miracles need prove it any more.  
 ' Doth the fruit show? Then miracles bade 'ware 445  
 ' At first of root and stem, saved both till now.  
 ' From trampling ox, rough boar and wanton goat.

[*Man not a machine.*]

' What? Was man made a wheelwork to wind up,  
 ' And be discharged, and straight wound up anew? 449  
 ' No!—grown, his growth lasts; taught, he ne'er forgets:  
 ' May learn a thousand things, not twice the same.  
 ' This might be pagan teaching: now hear mine.  
 ' I say, that as the babe, you feed awhile,  
 ' Becomes a boy and fit to feed himself,  
 ' So, minds at first must be spoon-fed with truth: 455  
 ' When they can eat, babe's nurture is withdrawn.

448. App. I, Simile 2.

450. *Fifine at the Fair*, 55:—

' I search but cannot see  
 What purpose serves the soul that strives, or world it trie  
 Conclusions with, unless the fruit of victories  
 Stay, one and all, stored up and guaranteed its own  
 For ever, by some mode whereby shall be known  
 The gain of every life.'

453. App. I, Simile 10.

' I fed the babe whether it would or no :  
 ' I bid the boy or feed himself or starve.  
 ' I cried once, " That ye may believe in Christ,  
 ' " Behold this blind man shall receive his sight ! " 460  
 ' I cry now, " Urgest thou, *for I am shrewd*  
 ' " *And smile at stories how John's word could cure—*  
 ' " *Repeat that miracle and take my faith ?* "  
 ' I say, that miracle was duly wrought  
 ' When, save for it, no faith was possible. 465  
 ' Whether a change were wrought i' the shows o' the  
     world,  
 ' Whether the change came from our minds which see  
 ' Of shows o' the world so much as and no more  
 ' Than God wills for His purpose,—(what do I  
 ' See now, suppose you, there where you see rock 470  
 ' Round us?)—I know not ; such was the effect,  
 ' So faith grew, making void more miracles  
 ' Because too much : they would compel, not help.

[ *Use your knowledge.* ]

' I say, the acknowledgment of God in Christ  
 ' Accepted by thy reason, solves for thee 475  
 ' All questions in the earth and out of it,  
 ' And has so far advanced thee to be wise.  
 ' Wouldst thou unprove this to re-prove the proved ?

461. *for* = since.

473. ' You must mix some uncertainty  
     With faith, if you would have faith be.'

478. Would you throw the rational conviction of *this* truth back again into the crucible of doubt, merely to have it re-proved for you by miracles ?

‘ In life’s mere minute, with power to use that proof,  
 ‘ Leave knowledge and revert to how it sprung? 480  
 ‘ Thou hast it; use it and forthwith, or die!

‘ For I say, this is death and the sole death,  
 ‘ When a man’s loss comes to him from his gain,  
 ‘ Darkness from light, from knowledge ignorance,  
 ‘ And lack of love from love made manifest; 485  
 ‘ A lamp’s death when, replete with oil, it chokes;  
 ‘ A stomach’s when, surcharged with food, it starves.

[*Light given in due degree.*]

‘ With ignorance was surety of a cure,  
 ‘ When man, appalled at nature, questioned first 489  
 ‘ “What if there lurk a might behind this might?”  
 ‘ He needed satisfaction God could give,  
 ‘ And did give, as ye have the written word:  
 ‘ But when he finds might still redouble might,  
 ‘ Yet asks, “Since all is might, what use of will?”

481. ‘And whenever we forget the vital connexion between the present and the past, and study origins without a reference to the things which they originate, our historic method at once degenerates into pedantic antiquarianism.’—ILLINGWORTH, *Bampton Lectures*, 1894.

494. If, because of power manifested in nature and acting so uniformly that we can deduce laws of its operation, we deny will (and personality) to the Infinite, while conscious of the combination of power and will in ourselves, we ‘turn round on,’ contradict the teaching of our own nature.

Either I have no will combined with my powers, or the Infinite has Will—is a Person—in an infinitely higher order.

To ‘turn round on oneself’ may mean, to turn on oneself *as on a pivot*, instead of rising to the higher Unity:—a touch of Hegel!

'—Will, the one source of might,—he being man 495  
 'With a man's will and a man's might, to teach  
 'In little how the two combine in large,—  
 'That man has turned round on himself and stands :  
 'Which in the course of nature is, to die.

[*Love revealed in the fullness of the time.*]

'And when man questioned, "What if there be love 500  
 '“Behind the will and might, as real as they?”—  
 'He needed satisfaction God could give,  
 'And did give, as ye have the written word :  
 'But when, beholding that love everywhere,  
 'He reasons, "Since such love is everywhere, 505  
 '“And since ourselves can love and would be loved,  
 '“We ourselves make the love, and Christ was not,”—  
 'How shall ye help this man who knows himself,  
 'That he must love and would be loved again,  
 'Yet, owning his own love that proveth Christ, 510  
 'Rejecteth Christ through very need of Him?  
 'The lamp o'erswims with oil, the stomach flags  
 'Loaded with nurture, and that man's soul dies.

[*Myths.*]

'If he rejoin, "But this was all the while  
 '“A trick; the fault was, first of all, in thee, 515

495. *Will* seems to prompt every putting forth of *might*.

506. See 555.

512, 13. Comp. 486, 7.

514. Here is reference to Strauss.

- ‘ “ The story of the places, names and dates,  
 ‘ “ Where, when and how the ultimate truth had rise,  
 ‘ “ —Thy prior truth, at last discovered none,  
 ‘ “ Whence now the second suffers detriment.  
 ‘ “ What good of giving knowledge if, because 520  
 ‘ “ O’ the manner of the gift, its profit fail?  
 ‘ “ And why refuse what modicum of help  
 ‘ “ Had stopped the after-doubt, impossible  
 ‘ “ I’ the face of truth—truth absolute, uniform?  
 ‘ “ Why must I hit of this and miss of that, 525  
 ‘ “ Distinguish just as I be weak or strong,  
 ‘ “ And not ask of thee and have answer prompt,  
 ‘ “ Was this once, was it not once?—then and now  
 ‘ “ And evermore, plain truth from man to man.  
 ‘ “ Is John’s procedure just the heathen bard’s? 530  
 ‘ “ Put question of his famous play again  
 ‘ “ How for the ephemerals’ sake, Jove’s fire was filched,  
 ‘ “ And carried in a cane and brought to earth :  
 ‘ “ *The fact is in the fable, cry the wise,*  
 ‘ “ *Mortals obtained the boon, so much is fact,* 535  
 ‘ “ *Though fire be spirit and produced on earth.*  
 ‘ “ As with the Titan’s, so now with thy tale :  
 ‘ “ Why breed in us perplexity, mistake,  
 ‘ “ Nor tell the whole truth in the proper words?”

518. Having at last been discovered to be no truth.

523. Which would have been impossible.

530. Comp. 274-298. App. I, Simile 8.

532. Aeschylus, *Prom.* 32, 3 : ‘for creatures of a day.’

533. So Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 43-53; and *Theogony*, 567: *Ἐν κοίλῃ νάρθηκι*. Aeschylus, *Prom.* 109.



[*The primal truth of evolution.*]

'I answer, Have ye yet to argue out 54°  
 'The very primal thesis, plainest law,  
 '—*Man is not God, but hath God's end to serve,*  
 'A master to obey, a course to take,  
 'Somewhat to cast off, somewhat to become?  
 'Grant this, then man must pass from old to new, 545  
 'From vain to real, from mistake to fact,  
 'From what once seemed good, to what now proves  
 best :  
 'How could man have progression otherwise?  
 'Before the point was mooted "What is God?"  
 'No savage man inquired "What is myself?" 55°  
 'Much less replied, "First, last, and best of things."  
 'Man takes that title now if he believes  
 'Might can exist with neither will nor love,  
 'In God's case—what he names now Nature's Law—  
 'While in himself he recognizes love 555

542. *Rabbi ben Ezra, xxx.*

545-9. This idea is developed very grandly in *Fifine at the Fair*, amid the mingled sublimities and sophistries of *Don Giovanni* :—

'Truth inside, and outside, truth also; and between  
 Each, falsehood that is change, as truth is permanence.'

550, 1. The idea of human personality was not reached till man began to seek after God. Illingworth's *Bampton Lectures* (1894), p. 8: 'The advent of Christianity created a new Epoch both in the development and recognition of human personality.'

555. This is worked out with convincing power in *Saul*, xvii, xviii. The whole is a commentary on this passage :—

'Would I suffer for him that I love! So wouldst Thou—so wilt Thou!'

'No less than might and will: and rightly takes.  
 'Since if man prove the sole existent thing  
 'Where these combine, whatever their degree,  
 'However weak the might or will or love,  
 'So they be found there, put in evidence,— 560  
 'He is as surely higher in the scale  
 'Than any might with neither love nor will,  
 'As life, apparent in the poorest midge,  
 '(When the faint dust-speck flits, ye guess its wing)  
 'Is marvellous beyond dead Atlas' self— 565  
 'Given to the nobler midge for resting-place!  
 'Thus, man proves best and highest—God, in fine,  
 'And thus the victory leads but to defeat,  
 'The gain to loss, best rise to the worst fall,  
 'His life becomes impossible, which is death. 570

[*Man must humbly take his place.*]

'But if, appealing thence, he cower, avouch  
 'He is mere man, and in humility  
 'Neither may know God nor mistake himself;  
 'I point to the immediate consequence  
 'And say, by such confession straight he falls 575  
 'Into man's place, a thing nor God nor beast,

563. App. I, Simile 11.

565. 'For the loving worm within its clod,  
 Were diviner than a loveless god  
 Amid his worlds I will dare to say.'

*Christmas Eve, v.*

569. Read: The gain to loss, | best rise to the worst fall.

'Made to know that he can know and not more :  
 'Lower than God who knows all and can all,  
 'Higher than beasts which know and can so far  
 'As each beast's limit, perfect to an end, 580  
 'Nor conscious that they know, nor craving more ;  
 'While man knows partly but conceives beside,  
 'Creeps ever on from fancies to the fact,  
 'And in this striving, this converting air  
 'Into a solid he may grasp and use, 585  
 'Find progress, man's distinctive mark alone,  
 'Not God's, and not the beasts' : God is, they are,  
 'Man partly is and wholly hopes to be.

[*Absolute and final certainty would destroy progress.*]

'Such progress could no more attend his soul  
 'Were all it struggles after found at first 590  
 'And guesses changed to knowledge absolute,

581. See *Cleon* :—

'Man might live at first  
 The animal life: but is there nothing more?  
 In due time, let him critically learn  
 How he lives; and the more he gets to know  
 Of his own life's adaptabilities,  
 The more joy-giving will his life become.'

The whole passage is a *locus classicus* in regard to human SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS.

582. Man not only perceives phenomena, but conceives the unseen. He has an added faculty of Conception.

585, 6. 'May grasp and use (and so) find progress.'

586. App. II, Simile 5.

588. 'A God though in the germ.'—*Rabbi ben Ezra*.

590. This answers 520-524.

'Than motion wait his body, were all else  
 'Than it the solid earth on every side,  
 'Where now through space he moves from rest to rest.  
 'Man, therefore, thus conditioned, must expect 595  
 'He could not, what he knows now, know at first;  
 'What he considers that he knows to-day,  
 'Come but to-morrow, he will find misknown;  
 'Getting increase of knowledge, since he learns  
 'Because he lives, which is to be a man, 600  
 'Set to instruct himself by his past self:  
 'First, like the brute, obliged by facts to learn,  
 'Next, as man may, obliged by his own mind,  
 'Bent, habit, nature, knowledge turned to law.  
 'God's gift was just that man conceive of truth 605  
 'And yearn to gain it, catching at mistake,  
 'As midway help till he reach fact indeed.

[*The Sculptor's idea.*]

'The statuary ere he mould a shape  
 'Boasts a like gift, the shape's idea, and next  
 'The aspiration to produce the same; 610  
 'So, taking clay, he calls his shape thereout,

600-607. Man's progress: the very idea involves it; learns by experience; obliged to learn by facts; then by mind, education, habit, natural constitution, by previous knowledge become a law; conceives, yearns, grasps, errs, and reaches the rock.

608. See App. I, Simile 12. Compare *Fifine at the Fair*, 52:—

'One hand—the master's—smoothed and scraped  
 That mass, he hammered on and hewed at, till he hurled  
 Life out of death.'

The whole will repay study.

'Cries ever, "Now I have the thing I see:"  
 'Yet all the while goes changing what was wrought,  
 'From falsehood like the truth, to truth itself.  
 'How were it had he cried "I see no face,                   615  
 '"No breast, no feet i' the ineffectual clay?"  
 'Rather commend him that he clapped his hands,  
 'And laughed "It is my shape and lives again!"  
 'Enjoyed the falsehood, touched it on to truth,  
 'Until yourselves applaud the flesh indeed                   620  
 'In what is still flesh-imitating clay.  
 'Right in you, right in him, such way be man's!  
 'God only makes the live shape at a jet.  
 'Will ye renounce this pact of creatureship?

[*You have copies of the Pattern.*]

'The pattern on the Mount subsists no more,                   625  
 'Seemed awhile, then returned to nothingness;  
 'But copies, Moses strove to make thereby,  
 'Serve still and are replaced as time requires:  
 'By these, make newest vessels, reach the type!  
 'If ye demur, this judgment on your head,                   630  
 'Never to reach the ultimate, angels' law,  
 'Indulging every instinct of the soul  
 'There where law, life, joy, impulse are one thing!

622. Here are *conception, yearning, reaching the true and real through partial failure and tentative effort.*

624. Would you escape *this inevitable necessity of your position* as a mere 'creature'? Absolute intuitive knowledge belongs only to the *Creator.* Answer to 524.

[*Conclusion.*]

'Such is the burthen of the latest time.  
 'I have survived to hear it with my ears, 635  
 'Answer it with my lips: does this suffice?  
 'For if there be a further woe than such,  
 'Wherein my brothers struggling need a hand,  
 'So long as any pulse is left in mine,  
 'May I be absent even longer yet, 640  
 'Plucking the blind ones back from the abyss,  
 'Though I should tarry a new hundred years!'

[*St. John dead. Sequel.*]

But he was dead: 't was about noon, the day  
 Somewhat declining: we five buried him  
 That eve, and then, dividing, went five ways, 645  
 And I, disguised, returned to Ephesus.

By this, the cave's mouth must be filled with sand.  
 Valens is lost, I know not of his trace;  
 The Bactrian was but a wild childish man,  
 And could not write nor speak, but only loved: 650  
 So, lest the memory of this go quite,  
 Seeing that I to-morrow fight the beasts,  
 I tell the same to Phoebas, whom believe!  
 For many look again to find that face,  
 Beloved John's to whom I ministered, 655  
 Somewhere in life about the world; they err:  
 Either mistaking what was darkly spoke

At ending of his book, as he relates,  
 Or misconceiving somewhat of this speech  
 Scattered from mouth to mouth, as I suppose. 660  
 Believe ye will not see him any more  
 About the world with his divine regard!  
 For all was as I say, and now the man  
 Lies as he lay once, breast to breast with God.

[*Epilogue.*]

[Cerinthus read and mused; one added this: 665  
 'If Christ, as thou affirmest, be of men  
 'Mere man, the first and best but nothing more,—  
 'Account Him, for reward of what He was,  
 'Now and for ever, wretchedest of all.  
 'For see; Himself conceived of life as love, 670  
 'Conceived of love as what must enter in,  
 'Fill up, make one with His each soul He loved:  
 'Thus much for man's joy, all men's joy for Him.  
 'Well, He is gone, thou sayest, to fit reward.  
 'But by this time are many souls set free, 675  
 'And very many still retained alive:  
 'Nay, should His coming be delayed awhile,  
 'Say, ten years longer (twelve years, some compute)  
 'See if, for every finger of thy hands,  
 'There be not found, that day the world shall end, 680  
 'Hundreds of souls, each holding by Christ's word  
 'That He will grow incorporate with all,

661-664. App. II, Simile 6.

664. St. John xxi. 20.

676, 7. 1 St. John ii. 18.

682. St. John xvii. 23; Rev. xxii. 17.

'With me as Pamphylax, with him as John,  
'Groom for each bride! Can a mere man do this?  
'Yet Christ saith, this He lived and died to do. 685  
'Call Christ, then, the illimitable God,  
'Or lost!'

But 't was Cerinthus that is lost.]





## NOTES OF LECTURES

ON

ROBERT BROWNING'S 'A DEATH IN THE DESERT'

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### CHAPTER I.

#### BROWNING'S POETRY IN GENERAL.

##### *Fancy and Fact.*

WE must first examine the 'setting' of the poem, *A Death in the Desert*. It is always difficult to find one's way into a piece of Browning. He has his own abrupt method of introducing his subjects, and sometimes the reader is almost half-way through the poem before he quite knows whither he is going. This may have arisen from the fact that the poet found the idea of his pieces, for the most part, as it were accidentally, in the course of his very multifarious—we might almost say universal—reading and research; and the student who has not been a companion of the master's literary journeys is apt to be at the outset bewildered, and only able to gather gradually by hints and stray words the connexion and antecedents of the poet's thought. Browning was an almost universal student. There is scarcely any dark and neglected corner in the literature of any land into which he did not try

to peer ; and wherever he went he found themes (sometimes very grotesque ones) for his verse, threw himself at once, in a way that bewilders the slower student, into the very spirit of the people amongst whom in thought he moved, talking as they were wont to talk, and making all kinds of erudite allusions to their literature and traditions. Thus, for the thorough and exhaustive study of Browning's poetry, if such be possible, one needs an omniscience like his own. He is a mighty stimulator of patient research and thought ; but then he amply rewards them.

People often say, 'Why did the poet not add explanatory notes, and so make the way easier for students?' The question is hardly a useful or practical one, since the fact is, that he has not given us such notes, however we may feel the want of them ; and we are consequently left to do our best, groping our way sometimes in the twilight, it must be allowed ; but always, one thinks, with tolerable certainty of attaining by honest work to satisfactory conclusions, if not to a perfectly clear understanding of the whole poem. It has been said, that when he was asked why he had not done more to popularize and make easy the study of his poems, he replied, that he did 'not write for the smoking-room.' This is a fair warning to his readers that he demands from them serious attention, and a somewhat laborious effort to follow in the footsteps of his thought. He would not say it with any unkind or supercilious feeling, for he was most genial, kindly and sympathetic ; but he certainly meant that readers of his poetry ought to be willing to take pains to understand what they read. He was certainly no 'idle singer of an empty day.' Those that cavil at Browning's acknowledged difficulty may

be reminded too, that they are at liberty to pass by what they feel they cannot comprehend, and may yet find in his works an astonishing abundance of first-rate poetry, which lies within the sphere of their comprehension. No one is bound to admire all, much less to comprehend all, that any poet has sung.

There is another thing of which the reader must be reminded: although our poet has ranged through almost all literature, and has sung lays of nearly every land, no one has ever heard of the detection of any incongruity, incorrectness, or anachronism, in any of his multifarious writings. He is, it seems, the most absolutely correct of all poets; and if Browning makes an allusion to any fact or circumstance, the reader may be quite sure that when he looks up the matter, he will find his attention called to something real and well worth studying. Our bard has carried the poetic faculty of minute and sympathetic consideration of things and persons not only into the region of flowers and scenery and mythology, but into the whole region of human knowledge and experience. To study Browning carefully and intelligently is a liberal education. We may say this without thinking of the great ideas of his poems, but merely of their 'setting' and allusions.

The writer was struck with the emphasis with which the poet one day assured him, in conversation, that *The Ring and the Book* was all 'true.' Again and again he repeated it, 'all true!' By which of course he meant that, in spirit, it was true, though many of the details had been filled in according to the suggestions of his imagination; as he says (*The Ring and the Book*, i. 464)—

Fancy with fact is just one fact the more.

He took the old MS. book, 'the square old yellow book,' with its 'crumpled vellum covers' (now in the Library of Balliol College, Oxford); and having read, re-read and studied at intervals for some years its documents and fragments, reconstructed the whole history:—

Thence bit by bit I dug  
The lingot truth, that memorable day,  
Assayed and knew my piecemeal gain was gold.  
I fused my live soul and that inert stuff.  
The life in me abolished the death of things,  
Deep calling unto deep: as then and there  
Acted itself over again once more the tragic piece.

He illustrates this 'resurrection and uprising' of old dead facts by some striking lines, which give us a hint as to the way in which his poetry was written, and *must be studied*:—

Was not Elisha once?—  
Who bade them lay his staff on a corpse-face.  
There was no voice, no hearing: he went in  
Therefore, and shut the door upon them twain,  
And prayed unto the Lord: and he went up  
And lay upon the corpse, dead on the couch,  
And put his mouth upon its mouth, his eyes  
Upon its eyes, his hands upon its hands,  
And stretched him on the flesh; the flesh waxed warm:  
And he returned, walked to and fro the house,  
And went up, stretched him on the flesh again,  
And the eyes opened. 'Tis a credible feat  
With the right man and way.

Which things are a parable for Browning students!

We may feel sure that the history and writings of St. John the Divine had been subjected by the poet to a process of this very kind; at any rate *A Death in the Desert* is very full of life to those who will carefully study it.

## CHAPTER II.

## THE PROLOGUE TO 'A DEATH IN THE DESERT' (1-12).

AND NOW we must try to obtain some definite idea of this noble composition, not only in regard to its 'setting,' but to its general teaching. It will be perfectly understood that the writer does not, in the least, profess to have gained a complete mastery of the poem, but as a fellow-student he confides to his readers, as far as he can, what he imagines himself to have seen in it.

The idea of the piece then is briefly this:—some Christian, whose name is not given (9, 10), is supposed to be examining his library—looking up and classifying his choice treasures. One imagines that he was an Ephesian (or perhaps an Alexandrian); that he may have lived in the beginning of the third century; that it was a time of hot persecution, when he was in daily peril of death; and that he is looking over a few of the more ancient Christian records to strengthen himself for coming trial, by the contemplation of the struggles of those that had gone before. He finds among others a parchment scroll attributed to Pamphylax of Antioch, who had died a martyr in Ephesus, just after the death of St. John the Apostle. This MS. is described in a very minute and realistic way. It is No. 5 in his library; consists of three skins of parchment glued together; is in the Greek language; is incomplete, since it ranges from *Epsilon* to *Mu*, so that four sections—pages we may call them—are missing in the beginning, and perhaps some at the end. This precious MS. is kept in a 'select chest,' an ark containing the most precious part

of his literary treasures. This chest—the poet may have seen such an one in several museums—was stained and rendered proof against the attacks of insects by being rubbed with turpentine, was covered with hair cloth, and had on its front the letter *Xi* (Ⲡ); since it had been given him by a relative named Xanthus, ‘now at peace.’ Two other letters seem to have been on the chest. These were the initials of his own names, or perhaps the first and last letters of his ordinary name. This name he will not state, but instead of it signs his note with a cross, ‘to show I wait His coming with the rest.’ Why he withheld his name we are left to conjecture: probably it was humility, since there is one Name that is above every name, and alone worthy to be had in remembrance. There is throughout a remarkable reticence as to names: even St. John is not here distinctly called so. The intensely real religious tone—the spirit of primitive Christianity—is heard and felt in the minutest details of the poem.

The first twelve lines then—the prologue—are supposed to be written by this anonymous owner on the outer side of the parchment. What follows is the MS. itself of Pamphylax, which relates the *Death in the Desert*, and gives in full detail the circumstances, as supposed by the poet, of the last hour upon earth of the holy Apostle St. John the Divine, and his dying words.

### CHAPTER III.

#### ST. JOHN IN THE DESERT. HIS COMPANIONS (13–81).

THE sixty-eight lines of description and narrative that follow are full of suggestions upon which the mind delights

to dwell, and to which it cannot but often recur. They relate all that is imagined to have happened before the Apostle began the great discourse in uttering which he died. These circumstances are developed with a wonderful realism. The poet has imagined and described for us a scene which we cannot help regarding as quite, in spirit, true, and has gathered together and woven in many traditions and hints in relation to the death of the Apostle. The situation as imagined by the poet is briefly this: An edict had been issued (in the time of Trajan, A.D. 98-117) to seize and put to death all Christians, and when the tidings reached Ephesus, Pamphylax himself, with Xanthus (the relative of the owner of the MS., line 8?) and another Christian called Valens, assisted by a strong Bactrian convert and a Christian boy, carried off to a place of safety the aged Apostle, who was supposed to be dying; but who lingered on for sixty days in the desert-retreat to which these faithful friends had borne him.

This retreat is described. It is a cave in the sandy plain, of which the outer chamber opens upon the desert itself. There is however a second and lower cave leading from this, and having an entrance to it not easily discovered from the outer cave. This is the 'midmost grotto.' There is yet a third, inner, or 'secret chamber' in the rock, which is entirely dark, while the middle one admits at noontide a few straggling rays of light. For sixty days the Apostle had lain in the secret chamber and in darkness. His loving attendants, feeling his death imminent, now bear him forth into the midmost grotto (21-34), that he may die in the light. The picture is a very touching one. The dying man—whom Jesus loved—lies now motionless and



unconscious ; his faithful friends desire to have the sight and catch the expression of his face while yet he lives—

For certain smiles began about his mouth,  
And his lips moved, presageful of the end. (33, 4.)

At the head stands the writer of the MS., Pamphylax, with Xanthus at the feet. On either side are Valens and the Boy. These all had lifted him from the inner chamber, and laid him here in the light. Half-way up the outer chamber, or mouth of the cave, was a Bactrian convert, who had accompanied them, and who had been appointed, at his own express desire, to keep watch, 'for the persecution was aware'—heathen soldiers were everywhere on the alert. The simple ruse by which they hoped to elude the vigilance of any stray passer-by is described (35-45). The Bactrian grazed the goat which they had brought with them, and it was arranged that if any intruder appeared he should yield up the goat (and perhaps his life with it) to the spoiler ; who, it was presumed, would pass on joyful in his prize, and not further explore the entrance to the cave.

They used various expedients to revive the unconscious Apostle, and the result was that he did—not actually wake, but—turn

And smile a little, as a sleeper does  
If any dear one call him, touch his face—  
And smiles and loves, but will not be disturbed. (51-54.)

This is simile 1 in Appendix I.

Xanthus then said a prayer, but still the dying one slept. (The writer adds that this Xanthus afterwards escaped to Rome, where he was burned, and so, he simply adds, 'could not write the chronicle.')

Then an incident is related which

seems as though it must have been founded upon some tradition : the Boy sprang up from his knees and,

Stung by the splendour of a sudden thought, (59),

ran and fetched one of the plates of lead on which the Gospel of St. John was engraven, and, feeling in the dim light with his finger, read out the words (St. John xi. 25), 'I am the Resurrection and the Life' (64). These inspiring words at once recalled the dying man to recollection : he sat up and looked at them (65, 6). If a great artist were in search of a subject for an immortal picture, surely he would find it here ; the thrice venerable Apostle—the beloved of the God-man, St. John the Divine ; the humble friends watching around ; the Boy with the leaden plate in his hand ; the gleam of light falling upon the wondrous face ; and, just visible outside in the mouth of the cave, the Bactrian, who from time to time uttered a cry like that of the ostrich, the prearranged signal that all was safe.

In this group surrounding the dying Apostle one feels sure that there is an allusion to the world-wide diffusion of Christianity : Pamphylax is, as his name indicates, a Greek ; Valens is obviously a Roman ; the Bactrian, whom the poet so sweetly describes in lines 649-650,

The Bactrian was but a wild childish man,  
And could not write nor speak, but only loved,—

represents the lower tribes of men, whom Greeks and Romans called 'barbarians,' while in Christianity there is nor Greek nor barbarian nor Scythian nor Roman ; all are one in Christ (Col. iii. 11). And in the Boy, who was

Stung by the splendour of a sudden thought,

there is a reminder that, then as now, these things are often hidden from the wise and prudent, while they are revealed to babes.

We may note that especially important documents were often engraven on metal plates. St. John's writings would certainly be so preserved. In their frequent hurried flights the ancient Christians never forgot the sacred vessels, nor the holy writings—or tablets.

And thenceforth nobody pronounced a word :

silence—like that in heaven (Rev. viii. 1), solemn and mystic—before the last utterance of the last Apostle. Then the dying man begins to speak. Recalled from the very border of the invisible world, his recollection of all things is at first confused and indistinct. His soul has retreated from the perished brain ; yet is he conscious that he himself, in his personal identity, remains, though wellnigh severed from the world of sense. Here the writer of the MS. adds a note (82-104) professing to give a *gloss*, or interpretation of a passage in St. John's own writings (1 John v. 8). This note is curious as giving an ancient (?) interpretation of these difficult words. In each man there are three souls, of which the first is the active soul, and belongs to the bodily senses ; the second makes use of the first, and dwelling in the brain is what knows, tending upwards to the last soul ; which constitutes man's very self—

and, tending up,

Holds, is upheld by, God, and ends the man

Upward in that dread point of intercourse. (99-101.)

There are thus in each man three souls, *that which does, that which knows, and that which is.* Such specula-

tions as these in after-times produced various Gnostic theories.

The 'Glossa' (or commentary) of Theotypas upon 1 John v. 8 is imaginary. The thought may have been connected with Plato's idea of the Three Souls in each man, the Vegetative, the Sensitive or active, and the Intellectual. The unity of the human soul is insisted upon by Dante—

un' alma sola  
Che vive e sente, e se in se rigira,  
one only soul  
Which lives, and feels, and on itself revolves;

and by Aquinas; but the ideas are somewhat different, and need not here be discussed. (Cf. Dante, *Purg.* xxv. 74, 75; *Summa* I, qu. 76, art. 3; and Liddon's *Dante and Aquinas.*)

In the Çaiva system of South India, the embodied soul is supposed to have sheaths (Kōça) which can be stripped off: (1) the 'sheath of food,' the body of sense; (2) the 'sheath of intellect'; (3) the 'sheath of supreme rapture.' These are essentially Browning's three souls.

## CHAPTER IV.

### ST. JOHN'S 'WITNESS.'

[In App. I, Simile 2, there is a summary of 105-125.]

THE next section (126-332) gives a summary of the work of St. John in the Christian world, and finally in Ephesus, where, as the last of the Apostles, the only surviving eye-witness of the great events recorded in the Gospel history,

the only living person whose eyes had seen the very God-man, the only one whose ear had heard His voice, the only hand that had touched Him (John i. 1-4), the last link between the days of the Son of man and the later age, he had laboured and waited, often reiterating the words of his own apocalyptic vision, 'Come, Lord Jesus, and come quickly.'

He is content, he says, to live on, if his life can render loving service to men (126); nay, he would be willing to tarry even a new hundred years to aid his struggling brothers (634-642). The thought recurs,

How will it be when none more saith, 'I saw'? (133.)

The idea that a new era was about to begin for the Christian world is made very prominent. St. John was the last who saw! Others have had his witness, rendered doubly effective by his personality. But now is coming the time when internal and experimental evidence must be mainly relied upon.

The Apostle's mind reverts to his old experiences: the aged live much in the past.

It is ever the way of love, he says, to rise by loving condescension (134), so Christ bade me to make known the story of His humiliation and 'uprise.' And at first he had confined himself to simple reiterated teaching of what he had heard from Christ's own mouth. He went for many years about the world, saying 'It was so; so I heard and saw.' And many received his testimony. Thus was Christianity propagated in the earliest days—a fire spreading from soul to soul. Next came the message recorded in the Book of the Revelation (Rev. i. 9, &c.):

there he was not bidden to teach anything orally, but to write, faithfully transcribing the visions that he saw, and the Revelation granted to him, from which he was not permitted to diminish anything, nor even to add words of his own (139-144). The next thing was that he wrote Epistles (of which three have been preserved); the whole burden of which was that

Men should, for love's sake, in love's strength, believe.

(Here comp. App. I, Simile 3.)

There was now 'Antichrist,' nay many 'Antichrists' (158), and with the Apostle the time had come to defend and guard the deposit of Christian truth, and thus he finally wrote his Gospel. The necessity for this last work is dwelt upon in ll. 166-182, and again in ll. 330-332.

Thus the main subject of the first part of this poem is *the personality, writings and witness of St. John*. At the risk of repetition—not unhelpful—we will sum up what may be called the Autobiography of St. John.

It is not till we have read nearly a hundred lines that we find that *A Death in the Desert* is the death of the last of the Apostles. A belief existed in the earliest days, founded upon a passage in his Gospel (xxi. 20, 23), that St. John was not to die till the second coming of Christ. This impression is referred to at the end of the poem (654-664). And there was also a tradition current in after-days, that in his grave in Ephesus he was simply asleep, and that the earth was seen to heave and subside as he breathed beneath. There were various legends in regard to his death, of which Browning has adopted one; but the more general belief was that his remains rested within the church of Ephesus,

where he had so long taught and ministered. Those who wish to study the life and writings of St. John cannot do better than make themselves familiar with the altogether invaluable commentaries and essays of the present Bishop of Durham, where everything that is necessary to illustrate the poem may be found. To this must be added Bishop Lightfoot's writings. Godet's *Commentary* is helpful; and the late Dean Stanley's *Essays on the Apostolic Age*, with Mrs. Jameson's unique work, should be consulted.

It is of course unnecessary to urge the necessity of a thorough examination of all St. John's writings in order to follow intelligently and profitably the description here given of his work and teaching. As the youngest and most enthusiastically devoted of the disciples; as nearly related to our Lord; as one of the three—Peter, James and John—admitted to a more personal intimacy with Jesus, and thus a witness of the Transfiguration and of the Agony in the Garden; as the disciple whom Christ loved, and who reclined on His breast at their meals, he had noted, as his Gospel shows, the minutest circumstances that occurred, treasuring up every word of his adored Master and Friend, and we might say every tone of His voice and glance of His eye.

The phraseology of his writings is quite peculiar to himself. There is the most striking contrast between the writings of St. John and St. Paul, and yet the most absolute identity in their principles. St. Paul is the teacher of Faith and Christian philosophy; St. John the herald of Love Divine. It has been said that St. John idealizes the history which he relates, and this is so; but, we believe and are sure, that his IDEA is the true one, and that it was taught

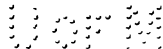
him by his Master, and by the Divine Comforter promised by the Master, to guide His disciples into all truth, and to bring to their minds all His sayings and commands. It is in the First Epistle of St. John that we most recognize how completely the idea of Love, as the essence of the Gospel, filled the Apostle's mind<sup>1</sup>. There LOVE, LIGHT, and VICTORY OVER SIN seem to sum up the great gifts of the Christian revelation. And thus Browning truthfully represents him as especially the teacher of Love. He repeatedly speaks of himself as the last of the witnesses of the facts of the Gospel history, kept alive to kindle amongst men this fire of Divine Love (115-118, 126-133):—

Such ever was love's way: to rise, it stoops.  
 Since I, whom Christ's mouth taught, was bidden teach,  
 I went, for many years, about the world,  
 Saying, 'It was so; so I heard and saw.'  
 Speaking as the case asked: and men believed.

(1 John i. 1.)

The historical details of this portion of the Apostle's life are not quite certain. He seems to have lived in Jerusalem, or its neighbourhood, with the Blessed Mother of Jesus for some years; and was a pillar of the Church with Peter and James (Gal. ii. 9). After her death he is said to have preached in many parts, and Parthia is especially mentioned as one of the scenes of his labour. He afterwards undoubtedly went to Ephesus, where he was, according to ecclesiastical tradition, Bishop of the Church. This was after St. Paul's work in Ephesus had been finished. It

<sup>1</sup> Two words are used to express Christ's love for St. John (St. John xiii. 24; xx. 2), *τηγάπα* = *diligebat*; *ἐφίλει* = *amabat*. The latter marks personal affection (Westcott).





was said (on no good evidence) that in the persecution of Domitian he was cast into a caldron of boiling oil, but came forth unhurt—a martyr in will though not in fact. He was then banished to Patmos, a small island in the Aegean. Of this period he speaks next (139-144). Here he had the visions recorded in the Book of the Revelation, of which he says :—

Afterward came the message to myself  
In Patmos isle ; I was not bidden teach,  
But simply listen, take a book and write,  
Nor set down other than the given word,  
With nothing left to my arbitrament  
To choose or change : I wrote, and men believed.

(Rev. i. 9, 11, 14, 15, 16 ; xxii. 18.)

It may be remarked here that the poet emphasises (116, 125) the title which the Apostle in his humility assumes : 'I, John, your *brother*.'

From this we pass on to the Apostle's work in Ephesus :—

I found a way,  
And, reasoning from my knowledge, merely taught  
Men should, for love's sake, in love's strength, believe.

There are many touching traditions connected with these years when he had become the 'aged friend' (245). These bear in general the stamp of truth. Thus it is said that one of his 'sons in Christ' had fallen into evil ways, and had in fact become the chieftain of a band of robbers. The Apostle sought him out, and was able to reclaim and lead him back to Ephesus : like the Good Shepherd leaving the ninety and nine, and going into the wilderness after the sheep that was lost. It is also said that one day, finding himself in the public baths with Cerinthus, the heretic, he rushed forth,



saying, 'Let us fly, lest the bath fall on us, since Cerinthus is within, the enemy of the truth.' This too seems quite credible. The sons of Zebedee and Salome (trace her history) were 'Sons of Thunder' (Mark iii. 17), and in their fervid youthful zeal and love were desirous of calling down even fire from heaven upon those that despised the Master Whom they loved. They felt and asserted themselves to be able to drink of their Master's cup of suffering and to bear His fiery baptism (Matt. xx. 20; Mark, x. 35, &c.). St. John himself, the Apostle of Love, uses language that to us seems stern and repellent, forbidding Christian people to receive into their houses the denier of the truth, or to wish him God-speed, 'lest they should become partakers of his guilt' (1 John iv. 3; 2 John 10).

Though full of love, he has no words of sympathy for the 'Antichrist' that denies the Incarnation of the Lord.

The Apostle next speaks of his Epistles, of which he notes that they are letters to friends urging the same things, not with the authoritative voice of an apostle, but 'as friend—nor less, nor more' (150).

We now come to the period of antagonism, when he had to

go over the old ground again,  
With Antichrist already in the world. (157, 8.)

Who Jaspar (160) was we cannot tell, but of a certain Diotrephes we read in St. John's third Epistle; and concerning the Ebionites, the Docetai, and the arch-heretic Cerinthus, abundant information can be found in ecclesiastical histories. One of the chief heresies was a denial of the supreme and conclusive claims of Christianity over Judaism. It was taught also by the Ebionites that Jesus

of Nazareth was simply a human Jewish prophet, and that it was His sole mission to revive and strengthen Judaism. Some taught that Christ was a mere phantom, having no real existence upon earth. Others taught that He was a mere man, upon whom the Divine Spirit at times descended, and was again withdrawn. Cerinthus was a bolder and more systematic heretic than the rest, going from place to place—an apostle of 'Antichrist.' This is all that is necessary to say about these subjects here. He says,—

I never thought to call down fire on such,  
Or, as in wonderful and early days,  
Pick up the scorpion, tread the serpent down<sup>1</sup>;  
But patient stated much of the Lord's life  
Forgotten or misdelivered, and let it work.

(Luke x. 19.)

This brings us to the last stage of his life, in which he wrote his Gospel (168-182 ; 329-332).

These passages need to be carefully studied, if we would apprehend the poet's idea, which we hold to be the true one, of St. John's Gospel. And this is an every-way important subject. According to Browning, much of what in the early days of St. John's discipleship was plain in regard to our Lord's words and deeds had now come to appear invested with new meanings, and capable of effecting larger results, than seemed at first (168-170):—

*What first were guessed as points, I now knew stars.*

And he adds significantly:—

Guarded and guided still to see and speak. (172.)

This line requires especial consideration, as asserting and defining the Divine Inspiration under which St. John wrote

<sup>1</sup> Or, 'dumb' (f).

and taught. It is one of the lines in which the poet has packed very closely some important truths. The Apostle, according to him, was *guarded* by the Divine Spirit from all error, and *guided* into all necessary truth. He had thus unerring *intuitions* of truth, and so spake and wrote.

There was a growing impatience in many minds, especially of younger men, for the promised Second Coming of Christ:—

For men said, 'It is getting long ago':  
 'Where is the promise of His coming?'—asked  
 These young ones in their strength, as loth to wait,  
 Of me who, when their sires were born, was old. (176-9.)

(2 Pet. iii. 4.)

And now came the sickness, and at the same time the persecution, and so he finds himself in the desert-cave (183-187). His last conscious thought, before the torpor seized him, from which he was now for a few moments aroused, and which was to end in his death, was—

Though the whole earth should lie in wickedness,  
 We have the truth, may leave the rest to God.

(1 John v. 19. Here compare App. I, Simile 4; and App. II. 3.)

## CHAPTER V.

### TEACHING FOR FUTURE AGES (333-365).

WE now return to St. John's thoughts as he finds himself once more with his faithful followers, and in communion with the world. It seems to him as if he had already entered another stage of existence, passed down the avenues

of the future time, and in prophetic vision beheld the men that are to be, and were listening to their words :—

I see you stand conversing, each new face,  
 Either in fields, of yellow summer eves,  
 On islets yet unnamed amid the sea ;  
 Or pace for shelter 'neath a portico  
 Out of the crowd in some enormous town  
 Where now the larks sing in a solitude ;  
 Or muse upon blank heaps of stone and sand  
 Idly conjectured to be Ephesus. (354-361.)

This is a very striking picture (taken here out of its place) of what the Seer is supposed to behold in the future, and enables us to realize in some measure the feeling of the aged teacher as in thought he saw the disciples of Christ in future times, and in divers lands, pondering and discoursing of those things which it had been given him to teach and write. They are his 'children, his beloved ones too.'

And first he hears them say,—

Was John at all, and did he say he saw ?  
 Assure us, ere we ask what he might see. (188-97.)

The question is repeated (335, 6). The answer is given very diffusely, and mingled with many considerations, that at first might almost seem foreign to the subject. It is the soliloquy of the aged man, who feels himself between two worlds, with no assured grasp of either. And first he tells these 'unborn people in strange lands,' that full conviction of the truths which he himself so entirely realizes can only come to them with experience and study, if they persevere, holding fast the first principles of Divine truths that he has

taught them, and through these advancing to fuller knowledge. But

To me, that story—ay, that Life and Death  
 Of which I wrote 'it was'—to me, it is; ...  
 —Is, here and now: I apprehend nought else.  
 Is not God now i' the world His power first made?  
 Is not His love at issue still with sin,  
 Visibly when a wrong is done on earth?  
 Love, wrong, and pain, what see I else around?  
 Yea, and the Resurrection and Uprise  
 To the right hand of the throne—what is it beside?

These words will appear to some as simply what is called mysticism. There arises at first a suspicion of a setting aside of the simple reality of the events related in the Gospels, and a substitution for them of a kind of allegory, in which human nature—the evolution of the world's history—is substituted for Christ. The idea of the poet however is, that the course of the world is not, and cannot be, viewed apart from the Incarnation. All life is a manifestation of a Divine purpose; hence the Apostle sees in the events of every hour that which is analogous to the Gospel history, and is working out the same Divine purpose. 'God was manifest in the flesh' receives its proof in the fact that God is now in the world His power first made, His love is still in conflict with sin visibly, in the workings of His Providence, in His Body the Church, and in those gracious means which He has appointed for men's salvation. The history of every day is

Supernal grace contending with sinfulness of man.

The Gospel history reveals love, evil and suffering in conflict: with these the world is filled; nay, moreover, in the Resurrection of Christ, His Ascension into heaven, and His Session at the right hand of the Father, we see what is

being ever wrought out in the world, and especially in the Church of Christ, for the redemption and restoration of all things. The Apostle cannot break up into fragments God's work in the world, and to Him, therefore, all 'life' is potentially the expression of a Divine purpose. So the Gospel history is not an account merely of a Divine intervention at a particular time, but also of a part, in absolute harmony with the whole, of God's gracious dealings with the world. By his experience and divine instincts St. John is enabled to see all this; but to those that come after, the facts of the old history will have to be critically studied, and from them God's purposes for the world divined, and evolved. He seems to regard the whole evolution of humanity as a vast complex movement of which he himself has intuitive knowledge, because he lives in its centre.

All this is best summed up in Bishop Westcott's words:—

The central characteristic of his, St. John's, nature is intensity, intensity of thought, word, insight, life. He regards everything on its divine side. For him the eternal is already: all is complete from the beginning, though wrought out step by step upon the stage of human action. All is absolute in itself, though marred by the weakness of believers. He sees the past and the future gathered up in the manifestation of the Son of God. This was the one fact in which the hope of the world lay. Of this he had himself been assured by evidence of sense and thought. This he was constrained to proclaim: *We have seen and do testify*. He had no laboured process to go through: *he saw*. He had no constructive proof to develop: *he bore witness*. His source of knowledge was direct, and his mode of bringing conviction was to affirm.

Some expressions that he here uses may seem at first sight doubtful, as for example,—

And, as I saw the sin and death, even so  
See I the need yet transiency of both,  
The good and glory consummated thence. (218-220.)

This is an idea upon which the poet very much delights to dwell: the necessity of evil, and the way in which it helps the evolution of the highest good. Sin and death are needed that holiness and the life of God may be made manifest, and then they pass away in the good and glory wrought out through them. A doctrine of the Holy Trinity seems to be unfolded (221-225): 'I saw the power,' the Father's creative might; 'I see the Love, once weak, resume the power'; or, in other words, I see Christ, Who lived and died on earth, now having all power in heaven and over earth; and 'in this word I see'—in the consciousness of power, by faith, to realize these things—I am conscious of the Presence and revealing Energy of the Spirit proceeding from the Father and the Son that gives to men 'light and life.'

But he proceeds: 'What I apprehend and see in just proportions by an intuition, and by personal experience, you will require to have set before you, as an object of study and analysis. You will need to apprehend the truths I see as plain historic facts; it will be necessary for you to withdraw your minds from the spiritual experience to the contemplation of the histories, in which 'the *life* and *death*' are set before you; and so you will have to contemplate them till the reality reveals itself through the facts, even as it is to me an intuition now' (226-243). (Compare here App. I, Simile 5.)

The next idea is that it is only by the experience of the love of God in Christ that men are able to gain the full realization of the truth (244-298). 'The indubitable bliss of fire' once felt needs no further proof.



And here we have to consider

the double way wherein we are led,  
How the soul learns diversely from the flesh. (251, 2.)

‘A thousand years ago,’ he says, ‘man’s bodily powers were mature as they now remain; but, in regard to the soul, new lessons are ever being learnt. The eternal power of God is ever, through the ages, more and more discerned; and as this scientific and philosophic culture increases, the knowledge of the love of God in Christ, like the ether floating over all for evermore, rises higher in man’s comprehension, with the development of all his powers. New lessons are thus ever to be learned:—

Till earth’s work stop and useless time run out. (267.)

Here is introduced the Promethean myth. Fire once given is duly valued, and can never be allowed to die out, but the gift of Truth is not so directly a matter of certainty. Its reality and worth must be tested, and the whole probation of life is just in this. *Can man learn to give up all for Truth?*

Will he give up fire  
For gold or purple once he knows its worth?  
Could he give Christ up were His worth as plain?  
Therefore, I say, to test man, the proofs shift,  
Nor may he grasp that fact like other fact,  
And straightway in his life acknowledge it,  
As, say, the indubitable bliss of fire.

(Compare App. I, Simile 6.)

Another objection is supposed to be regretfully raised: it is not possible for us in these later days to realize the facts of the Christian history as men did in the olden time: ‘it had been easier once than now’ (299). The very impor-

tant answer to this runs on to line 317. He recalls the way in which he, who had seen Christ transfigured (Luke ix. 28-36), seen him 'tread the sea (John vi. 19) and bring the dead to life' (John xii. 44), had been through fear induced to forsake His Master and flee (310. Mark xiv. 50). *Every period has its peculiar temptations.* Had they lived in the earliest time they might not perhaps have been assailed by doubts, but would have had other difficulties to face. It is only subjective realization of the truth and power of the Gospel that can keep men steadfast in the Faith. Thus in a few years not only he, but the weakest woman and the tenderest child, could face torture and death joyfully for Christ's sake (312-317). They had learned to realize and feel the power of the truth.

So Pascal has said :—

Not thus willed He to appear in His gentle advent, because since so many men make themselves unworthy of His mercy, He willed to leave them deprived of the good which they refuse. It had not then been just that He should appear in a manner plainly divine, and wholly capable of convincing all men, but neither had it been just that He should come in so hidden a manner as not to be recognized of those who sincerely sought Him. He has willed to reveal Himself wholly to these, and thus willing to appear openly to those who seek Him with their whole heart, and to hide Himself from those who fly Him with all their heart, He has so tempered the knowledge of Himself as to give signs of Himself visible to those who seek Him, and obscure to those who seek Him not<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Compare 'The Tablet on the Wall' commemorating the martyred slave :—

I was born sickly, poor and mean,  
 A slave : no misery could screen  
 The holders of the pearl of price  
 From Caesar's envy ; therefore twice

## CHAPTER VI.

## SPECIAL OBJECTIONS AND DIFFICULTIES (318-421).

'WELL, was truth safe for ever then?' (318). Perfect love had cast out fear. Were there no other trials and temptations in those favoured times of light and love? Yes, false teachers arose; Ebion, Cerinthus (329), and others taught false doctrine, and drew men away from the saving faith of Christ. It was this, as stated before (166), that led to his writing the Fourth Gospel; but it is alluded to here to accentuate the idea that each period has its especial difficulties or 'burthens.' They are 'burthens' to be borne. *We* rather speak of them as problems to be solved. 'Truth needs love's eye to pierce the o'erstretched doubt' (321). He now turns to the consideration of the peculiar 'burthen' of the later days.

No longer is the question

Where is the promise of His coming? . . .  
 but  
 Was He revealed in any of His lives,  
 As Power, as Love, as Influencing Soul?

I fought with beasts, and three times saw  
 My children suffer by his law;  
 At last my own release was earned:  
 I was some time in being burned,  
 But at the close a Hand came through  
 The fire above my head, and drew  
 My soul to Christ, whom now I see.  
 Sergius, a brother, writes for me  
 This testimony on the wall—  
 For me, I have forgot it all.

(*Easter Day, ix.*)

To this it is replied that the main instructor must ever be the written Word :—

*My book speaks on* because it cannot pass<sup>1</sup>. (368.)

The Word of God abideth for ever. St. John's Gospel is full of Christ's words, and He has said, 'Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass.' The Apostle however sees that some in the after-time will hear the teachings of the revealed word 'quietly'—not at all scoffingly—with the desire to believe, but will feel doubts and difficulties assail them (369).

These humble pious souls will not scoff, but anxiously and sadly plead; and the objections thus reverently and sorrowfully urged are three. Firstly—

Here is a tale of things done ages since;

What truth was ever told the second day? (370, 1.)

Tradition is not to be relied on : all is myth and legend. The records are very soon altered, falsified, distorted !

Secondly—

Wonders, that would prove doctrine, go for nought : (372.)

i.e. *Miracles cannot prove the truth of doctrine.*

And thirdly—

Remains the doctrine, Love; well, we must love,

And what we love most, power and love in one,

Let us acknowledge on the record here,

Accepting these in Christ: must Christ then be?

Has He been? Did not we ourselves make Him?

*Our mind receives but what it holds, no more.* (370-8.)

These objections are amplified in about forty lines, the sum of which is that the idea of the love of God is merely

<sup>1</sup> If we read 'My books speak on' = 'Let my books speak on,' the meaning is the same.

'projection from man's inmost mind.' Christianity is altogether subjective, the objector urges.

There is no other way, at least, he insists, of proving the existence of Christ or of God. The existence of love is allowed, but such love was already in ourselves. So also it must be admitted that power exists, but it is now seen to be mere force or natural law, which we ourselves discern. 'Will, intelligence, love,' belong exclusively to man; it is he that imputes these to what he calls God:—

So law in turn discards power, love, and will. (419.)

It is to these statements that the dying teacher is made to address himself mainly up to the end of the argumentative portion of the piece.

It is characteristic of the realism of the poet that he makes the Apostle, after hearing in imagination these objections, pause awhile; and, when his attendants offer him wine to strengthen him for the remainder of his task, reply:—

Nay, do not give me wine, for I am strong,  
*But place my Gospel where I put my hands.* (422, 3.)

Surely the poet meant to emphasize the truth that the simple study of the Holy Gospels is the best way to prepare ourselves to meet all objections and find all truth. (App. II, 1.)

The general idea of the reply—which, as the soliloquy of a very aged man, is discursive, returns on itself, reiterates great principles, and seems at times almost to lose itself (424–513)—is that men should not pause to discuss archaeological questions, historical evidences, and critical matters; but, having received the revelation of an all-sufficing truth—such as that of the love of God manifested in Christ—should

proceed at once to the practical application and fuller development of this truth. 'Why waste your time upon questions as to my existence, and as to the authenticity and genuineness of my writings, and as to the details and alleged discrepancies in the records? These will fall into their place by-and-by. Remember that all truth is given to man that he may rise continuously higher and higher, leaving the things that are past and reaching onward to what is before. In this way men "apprehend God newly at every stage," and will at each step find the necessary helps to this ever-growing faith (432). The way to obtain a peaceful assurance of the reality of the Gospel is to accept it in simplicity, and apply it to the solution of the problems of the life of the day and hour. To be always questioning about proofs and evidences instead of using Christian teaching, as the only working hypothesis for human life, is unreasonable, and must be fruitless. Use the knowledge already given "or die"' (481).

The idea is put forward by the objector that, since Divine love has become known to man, it must have had its origin in his own soul:—

We acknowledge Christ—

A proof we comprehend His love, a proof

We had such love already in ourselves,

Knew first what else we should not recognize.

*'Tis mere projection from man's inmost mind.* (379-83.)

This is repeated in 421. This argumentative perversion of the Divine gift of love in Christ is the object of the poet's severest animadversion; for here, 'a man's loss of love arises from his gain; his darkness from the very light; his ignorance from the knowledge graciously imparted to

him ; his lack of love from the very manifestation of love in the Gospel' (482-485 ; 505-513).

The next point is the revelation of *power* and *will* (389-421). Because man sees power he wrongly infers necessity, and denies both a benevolent will to the Infinite, and a self-determining will to man. From power he passes to the idea of unloving law and absolute necessity (400). He thus learns to substitute 'Nature's law' for God (554). Yet 'will' is the one source of might, and each individual may, from a consideration of his own personality, arrive at the conclusion that will and might must always and everywhere 'combine'—as in man's constitution, so in the whole universe ; and if a man deny this, it is death to him : fatalism is the death of the soul (495-499).

In regard to miracles, the Apostle asserts their reality, but denies their present necessity :—

I say, that miracle was duly wrought  
 When, save for it, no faith was possible.  
 Whether a change were wrought i' the shows o' the world,  
 Whether the change came from our minds which see  
 Of shows o' the world so much as and no more  
 Than God wills for His purpose,—(what do I  
 See now, suppose you, there where you see rock  
 Round us ?)—I know not ; such was the effect,  
 So faith grew, making void more miracles  
 Because too much : they would compel, not help. (464-73.)

It seems that the poet did not consider it necessary to believe in, or (at least) to insist upon, the objective reality of all miracles. Since their one design and purpose was to afford a proof, to those who beheld them, of the supernatural character of the Revelation, it was only necessary that a subjective impression should be produced, or as

he puts it, 'a change wrought in the shows of the world.' The essential matter was that an impression of supernatural agency should be created; and, with the growth of faith, which apprehends God in everything, the necessity for such abnormal impressions is removed. In fact they would compel faith, making men mere machines, and changing faith into sight, and thus depriving it of its disciplinary power. (Compare App. I, Similes 8, 9, 10.)

So Pascal says:—

A miracle, says one, would strengthen my faith. He says so when he does not see one. Reasons seen from afar seem to limit our view, but as we reach them we begin to see beyond. Nothing stops the activity of our spirit. There is no rule, we say, which has not its exception, no truth so general but that there is a side on which it is lacking. If it be not absolutely universal, we have a pretext for applying the exception to the matter in hand, and for saying: *This is not always true, hence there are cases in which it is not so. It only remains to show that this is one of them.* And we must be very awkward or unlucky if we do not find one some day.

Miracles are no longer needful, because they have already been.

## CHAPTER VII.

### MYTHS (514-633).

ANOTHER objection is now urged, and may be considered as a phase of the former: 'The whole history of the Gospel,' it is urged, 'though containing at its core substantial truth, is really a myth'—'the story of the places, names and dates' is untrue, unhistoric. Why not impart the 'ultimate truth'—'absolute' knowledge of God—without these fables? In



this way doubt would become impossible, and men would have pure, uniform and absolute knowledge (523-4).

Thus there is *fire* in the world, and its presence was accounted for by the ancients in the myth of Prometheus (279-286, 530, 9):—

The fact is in the fable, cry the wise,  
Mortals obtained the boon, so much is fact,  
Though fire be spirit and produced on earth.  
As with the Titans, so now with thy tale.

The answer to this has been implicitly given before ; and it must be frankly acknowledged that what immediately follows is difficult to understand as an answer to this particular objection. For Strauss, the Tübingen school and German biblical critics in general, our bard had little reverence, as we see in *Christmas Eve*, xiv-xviii. Yet here his words seem to imply somewhat of a concession to the objector: 'Even though this, in any degree, were to be conceded as true, yet the way in which man is taught in the world is by aid of illusions, or facts imperfectly understood. Not a creed is given, but a history. We have a history—written by men, handed down by tradition, susceptible of differing interpretations—not a creed, or a syllabus divinely given, sufficient and clear. Thus it is He teaches us. 'The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us': the Life and Death are certain, and the gain of love is assured ; from these data, with humble yearning hearts, must we proceed to develop our religious beliefs. We are in perfect humility to follow God's method, to accept what we have and know, and pass onward

From vain to real, from mistake to fact,  
From what once seemed good, to what now proves best, (542-7),

from our first vain fancies, mistakes, and imagined good things to a Christian faith at once rational and sufficing.

Meanwhile, if man believes that power may exist in the case of the Infinite without either will or love, and learns to call this 'Natural Law,' as a substitute for God; while at the same time he recognizes in himself the co-existence of love and might and will, he surely arrogates to himself a higher nature than he concedes to God; and thus the abundant manifestations of God's power leading to man's perversion of it, become the means of death and not of life (549-570).

In illustration of lines 549, 550 and what follows the following passage is helpful—

We find, then, that Jesus Christ, as depicted in the pages of the New Testament, threw a totally new light upon the personality of man. He took *love* as His point of departure, the central principle in our nature, which gathers all its other faculties and functions into one; our absolutely fundamental and universal characteristic. He taught us that virtues and graces are only thorough when they flow from love; and further, that love alone can reconcile the opposite phases of our life, action and passion, doing and suffering, energy and pain, since love inevitably leads to sacrifice, and perfect sacrifice is perfect love. It may be granted that previous teachers had said somewhat kindred things. But *Jesus Christ* carried His precepts home by practice, as none had ever done before. *He lived and died the life and death of love; and men saw, as they had never seen, what human nature meant.* Here at last was its true ideal, and its true ideal realized. Now the content of man's own personality is, as we have seen, the necessary standard by which he judges all things, human or divine; his final court of critical appeal. Consequently one effect of the life of Christ upon our race was to provide us, if the phrase may be allowed, with a new criterion of God. Man had learned that love was the one thing needful, and had looked into the depths of love, as he had never looked

before. And thenceforth love became the only category under which he could be content to think of God.

(ILLINGWORTH, *Bampton Lectures*, 1894.)

It only remains then for man in all humility to acknowledge (573) that he the finite cannot know God the Infinite ; nor yet can he be mistaken in attributing to himself some modicum of *might* and *will* and *love*. This humility of mind puts him at once in his proper place : he no longer presumes to dictate *à priori* the method and character of the Divine Revelation, but, because of its internal evidence and power over men, accepts it ; and thus finds 'progress,' which could not be found if 'absolute knowledge' had been at once imparted. The whole passage (575-633) had better be studied (apart from its context) as an exposition of the way in which the poet believes that man is to advance to the full knowledge and fruition of God. He is in the universe a 'thing which is neither God nor beast' ; he is 'made to know that he is capable of knowledge and not more' ; he is lower than God, Who has all knowledge and all power ; he is higher than the beasts, which have only knowledge and power to the limit of their nature, and adapted to the ends of their being, having no consciousness of their knowledge, nor desire to increase it. Man knows but in part, yet besides his knowledge he has conceptions of what may be ; so

Creeps ever on from fancies to the fact. (583.)

In this way he finds *progress*, which distinguishes man at once from God and from the brute creation :—

God is, they are,  
Man partly is and wholly hopes to be. (586-8.)

Absolute knowledge would be the death of progress. In such a case the mind could no more advance than the body could, if all else than itself were solid earth on every side (593, 4). Thus are we educated, developed, trained in life's gymnasium. What man knows to-day he could not have known yesterday; and to-morrow he will gain fresh knowledge, and must ever rise 'on stepping-stones of his dead self to higher things.' We are obliged like brutes to learn at first by facts—thence we rise to principles and law; and God's gift to us is that we should first have faint intuitions of the truth, and ever yearn to gain it, often catching at mere mistakes as helps, till at length we reach the 'facts indeed' (670)<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> 'The whole material world is a beneficent illusion to the intellect. . . . The very air that we breathe, and through the medium of which we see, cannot be trusted to present objects correctly to our sight. Even in the purest atmosphere the process of refraction must go on, and the sun must appear each day to rise before its time and with a slightly distorted orb. If, then, the different layers of our atmosphere, our medium of sight, have been so ordained by God that they shall always reveal to us the truth, yet leave part of the truth distorted or unrevealed, how is it unlikely that God may likewise have so constructed the several strata of the medium of His spiritual Revelation that the truth might be always more or less refracted and concealed, thus mercifully making us ever discontented with our modicum of knowledge, and, as we correct sight by the aid of Reason, so leading us to correct our interpretation of Revelation by the aid of Conscience.' (E. A. ABBOT, *Through Nature to Christ*, v. 73.

'God is making man in His own image, when He reveals to him the creation in its true nature, when He inspires him with a knowledge of the whole, and a love for the good of the whole. But the first step in this divine instruction was precisely the bold imagination by which man threw out into nature an image of himself. The form that imagination threw into the air was gradually modified and sublimed as man rose in

[Here comes in the Simile, App. I. 12.]

The words—

Right in you, right in him, such way be man's!  
 God only makes the live shape at a jet, (623, 4),

teach that man must ever be striving to realize his ideals, to follow out the faintest indications of the truth, until he has its perfect image set up in his soul. To God alone belongs the creation at once by His word of that which is perfect, and the giving consummate expression to His idea, fully and at once. Can man then expect to rise above that which is the essential mark of a created Being (624)? Of course, the poet cannot mean to deny that in evolution the Divine ideas are (if it may be permitted to say so) elaborated in a manner analogous to the sculptor's work; but He has other ways of self-manifestation. What is meant by 'the pattern on the Mount' may seem a little doubtful. The reference is to Heb. viii. 5; ix. 23. The pattern shown to Moses on the Mount was withdrawn; but all that Moses caused to be constructed according to the pattern permanently remained, and was renewed from time to time. So St. John seems to say that Christ's visible Presence is in these latter days withdrawn, and it is for

virtue, and nature was better understood, till at length it harmonizes with, and merges into, a truth of the reason (379-387). Was man to wait for his God and his religion till his consciousness, in all other respects, was fully developed? Or was the revelation of the great truth to be sudden? Apparently not. Man *dreamt* a god first. But the dream was sent by the same Power, or came through the same law, that revealed the after-truth.' (W. SMITH, *Thorndale*, V. ii. § 6. Quoted by ILLINGWORTH, *Bampton Lectures*, 1894.)

us to reproduce, according to the pattern exhibited in the Gospels—the Image of Christ, the embodiment of God's Infinite love—lives of faith, of purity and of self-sacrificing love, ever striving after conformity to His perfect example (1 St. John iv. 17).

‘The perfected disciple shall be as his Master’ (St. Luke vi. 40).

#### EPILOGUE (665-687).

There is some difficulty (at least in some minds) about the supposed authorship of the Epilogue. It probably (though other interpretations are possible) was by Pamphylax himself (683). It seems that the MS. was shown to the heretical Cerinthus, who read it and ‘mused’ (665). When he had gone away, ‘one’ added the lines which form the epilogue. The unwillingness to use names is noticeable throughout. In the MS. itself Pamphylax is not named, nor even St. John. The idea of this postscript is that an appeal is made in it to Cerinthus, who regarded Christ as a merely human teacher. ‘If Christ be merely a man, He must surely be accounted to have been most unfortunate and unsuccessful; for His idea of life was love, to be communicated by Himself to every soul of His beloved ones. And now He has gone, you teach, as other mere men, to His “rest”! Meanwhile there are multitudes of souls waiting, holding by His word, for His second coming, and expecting that as the Mystic Bridegroom He will unite Himself to each believing soul as His bride’ (Rev. xxii. 17).

‘Either then He is the “illimitable God,” or He has failed in that which He desired and promised, and is

“lost.”’ The writer adds, ‘but ’twas Cerinthus that was lost.’

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We here take our leave of the poem. It has brought us into the very presence of the last of the holy Apostles, and of a company of humble, unknown, loving friends of his. The unnamed owner of the MS., Pamphylax, of whom we know scarcely anything but his earnest devotion, and the fact that ‘to-morrow he was to fight the beasts’ (652); Xanthus, who ‘says a prayer’ (55), and shares in loving service to the Saint, ‘escaped to Rome and was burned,’ and who possibly was the relative that gave the MS. to its unnamed owner; the Bactrian, untaught and ‘wild,’ but with heart full of love and utter devotion; Valens, who aided in the pious task, and of whom the chief record is that he ‘broke the ball of nard’ (55) that filled the chamber of death with sweet perfume,—reminding us of her who broke the box of precious unguents, the sweet fragrance of which fills, and must fill for ever, the House of God; and the Boy (58-64), the episode regarding whom recalls the words, ‘Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings He hath perfected praise,’—all these have passed before us. We have had moreover a glimpse of the companies of diverse men discussing Christian themes in after-ages, and have heard the murmurs of their doubts and disputings, as the echo of our own voices (354-365). The clear low tone of the disciple whom Jesus loved, speaking his last, have sounded in our ears, bidding us believe, and love and obey, waiting for the light and ever advancing towards it. The greatest of all the lessons taught us here seems to be that, to receive the faith into our souls in spite of all difficulties,

and to grow thereby day by day in love and likeness to Christ, is what we must aim at, in this our time of probation, where we see 'through a glass darkly,' and 'know but in part.' There is a consummation awaiting the faithful, when they shall

reach the ultimate, angels' law,  
Indulging every instinct of the soul,  
There where law, life, joy, impulse are one thing!

END OF NOTES



## APPENDIX I

### SIMILES IN 'A DEATH IN THE DESERT'

IN studying a great poem, which is in many ways peculiarly difficult, it may prove helpful, before attacking the fundamental reasonings of the work, to take it to pieces, and examine some of its parts in detail, so as to get familiarized with its manner and tone. We have then taken out, and commented (of course in a quite superficial way) upon the twelve chief similes which are elaborated after the poet's peculiar method, and constitute no small part of the value and charm of the piece.

#### SIMILE 1.—*The Sleeper* (51-54).

Only, he did—not so much wake, as—turn  
And smile a little, *as a sleeper does*  
*If any dear one call him, touch his face—*  
And smiles and loves, but will not be disturbed.

This simile, in a very touching manner, illustrates the condition of the Apostle, scarcely to be roused from the torpor of invading death; incapable of any effort, who yet smiles and loves, though we might almost say, 'he lives no more.' LOVE was the watchword of his life, and according to the oldest tradition the last utterance of his teaching in Ephesus; and here too (637). The story (its own evidence) says that, when too feeble to teach any more, he was borne to the church in Ephesus, where feebly uplifting his withered hand in benediction, he whispered to his beloved ones, 'My little children, love one another.'

The keynote of the poem and of the Apostle's life and writings was LOVE, as it is of the whole Christian Revelation.

SIMILE 2.—*Fire in the Embers* (105-113).

And then, 'A stick, once fire from end to end;  
Now, ashes save the tip that holds a spark!  
Yet, blow the spark, it runs back, spreads itself  
A little where the fire was: thus I urge  
The soul that served me, till it task once more  
What ashes of my brain have kept their shape,  
And these make effort on the last o' the flesh,  
Trying to taste again the truth of things'—  
(He smiled)—'their very superficial truth.'

This most expressive, though quaint and homely simile, illustrates the struggle between the death that extinguishes the fire of life and the energy of the soul, that claims yet for a little while the use of the material brain, which is like a burnt stick in whose ashes still lives a hidden fire. It is a great part of the teaching of the poem that the body is but the stick—in which is kindled the fire of physical life (85-88).

The satire in the last line brings out what is taught afterwards more explicitly; man sees but the surface of things.

SIMILE 3.—*The Sea-jelly on the Shore* (152-157).

But at the last, why, I seemed left alive  
*Like a sea-jelly weak on Patmos strand,*  
To tell dry sea-beach gazers how I fared  
When there was mid-sea, and the mighty things.

Thus he illustrates the feebleness into which he had sunk, and quite naturally recalls an experience of the time when he was an exile in the Isle of Patmos, on whose strand the quivering sea-jelly lies, a memorial to the gazers on the dry sea-beach, of the mighty things of the mid-sea from whence it has emerged. The simile, very simple as it is, lends harmonious colouring to the whole passage.

St. John is to teach all generations of Christians how to walk as seeing Him that is invisible ; how to realize, amid the dimness of human life, the brightness that must have attended Christ's first manifestation of Himself to mankind. The Apostle himself had possessed the full light of Christ's visible presence ; it had been withdrawn. During the long years of his waiting he had learnt to live by the power of the realized idea of the 'light of Love' ; he feels that he is a fitting teacher for those who will have to go on their way with neither the visible Christ among them, nor any actual witness of the facts of the Gospel history ; and this teaching occupies the rest of his discourse. It was to impart this that he had been kept alive :—

Left to repeat, 'I saw, I heard, I knew,'  
And go all over the old ground again.

He teaches with effect, because his teaching is founded upon his own personal experience. It will be instructive to compare here, verse by verse, 2 Peter i-ii. 2.

**SIMILE 4.—*The Feebleness of utter Exhaustion* (188-197).**

Yet now I wake in such decrepitude  
As I had slidden down and fallen afar,  
Past even the presence of my former self,  
Grasping the while for stay at facts which snap,  
Till I am found away from my own world,  
Feeling for foot-hold through a blank profound.

This simile illustrates the Apostle's feeling in his utter decrepitude, in a way that many of us may realize. In the extreme weakness after fever, this strange feeling is often experienced of sliding down and falling into unspeakable gulfs where the personal identity seems utterly lost, though the soul feebly tries to retain some hold, or to regain it, upon the world. Then comes the 'blank profound' and the slumber, from which, with, it may be, a little gain of strength, the sick man awakes to resume the struggle for a foothold once more in the old

familiar world. Here the Apostle is represented as being carried in the half delirium, not without the divine inspiration and the upholding, into the future time when the world shall ponder the truth to which he has up to this time borne witness. He has, as it were, a second apocalypse, and is shown things to come, and hears words that shall be said by generations yet unborn. Compare lines 354-361.

SIMILE 5.—*The Reversal of the Telescope* (226-243).

But ye, the children, His beloved ones too,  
 Ye need,—as I should use an optic glass  
 I wondered at erewhile, somewhere i' the world,  
 It had been given a crafty smith to make;  
 A tube, he turned on objects brought too close,  
 Lying confusedly insubordinate  
 For the unassisted eye to master once :  
 Look through his tube, at distance now they lay,  
 Become succinct, distinct, so small, so clear !

What lies quite close and around us is sometimes apprehended indistinctly and confusedly, out of focus ; but seen through a reversed telescope is projected into the further distance, reduced in size, but made distinct, so that the eye can now gain a clear picture, not so vividly affecting the gazer, but compensating by its accuracy of definition for the absence of the reality of immediate vision. Thus the poet illustrates the difference between the impressions made upon the mind by the events in the midst of which we live, and move, and have our being, and the clearer, more definite and pictorial representations of these same facts in digested history. The bearing of this upon the argument is discussed afterwards.

In line 238 the word '*would*' is a little difficult, and seems to waver between the idea of *desire* and *need*. It would become a necessity for succeeding generations to direct their minds laboriously upon facts of past time, upon the recorded histories of that Life and Death, in order that, steadfastly contemplating

the Christ of history, they might see the Star of Bethlehem spreading itself out on every side, shedding light on every region of human experience, becoming in fact the whole universe to the loving contemplative soul. The reward of such single-hearted diligent study is that Christ, the manifested Love of God, becomes all in all to the devout mind (240-243).

SIMILE 6.—*Prometheus and Fire from Heaven*  
(274-298, 530-536).

That fable of Prometheus and his theft,  
How mortals gained Jove's fiery flower, grows old  
(I have been used to hear the pagans own)  
And out of mind; but fire, howe'er its birth<sup>1</sup>,  
Here is it, precious to the sophist now  
Who laughs the myth of Aeschylus to scorn,  
As precious to those satyrs of his play,  
Who touched it in gay wonder at the thing.

This reference to the myth of Prometheus emphasizes the fact that the value of the gift of Divine Love once bestowed, and actually possessed by those to whom it has been imparted, depends nowise upon the credibility or otherwise of the story which accounts for the communication of the gift. The gift is all in all.—'Prometheus is an imaginary being' (530-538)!  
Yet

Mortals obtained the boon, so much is fact,  
Though fire be spirit and produced on earth. (535, 6.)

It is not to be supposed for an instant that the Gospel history which tells us how the divine fire of love was brought down by the Incarnate God, is considered by Browning to be a myth. St. John again and again declares that he saw, heard, and handled the things of which he speaks; but, since in Christianity this fire from heaven is found shining, burning

<sup>1</sup> *Ferishtah's Fancies*; 'THE SUN,' p. 31.

and radiating, ever warming the hearts of men, the first question for any of us to consider is the reality of the gift, from which ultimately the truth of the history will be inferred and felt. We believe every detail of St. John's writings, but the truths enshrined in them, the essential facts, are of infinitely greater importance than any of those details upon which the critical mind is apt to dwell almost exclusively.

This simile therefore, in which the central idea is that *Love is FIRE from heaven, and no otherwise obtained*, is of great importance, as we see, in the argument.

*The Satyrs of Aeschylus, and the Fire (285-286).*

This allusion of the poet shows the way in which he found apt illustrations in the most out-of-the-way corners and by-paths of literature. There is a lost play of Aeschylus, that was called 'Prometheus the Firebringer.' Fragments of it are given by Dindorf and other editors. One of these fragments was found in Plutarch's *Morals*. It commemorates the wonder of the Satyrs at the first lovely apparition of the 'purple flower of fire' in the forest. They danced around it, and would have kissed and embraced it, but the warning was given in a line which has become a Greek proverb :—

Τράγος γένοιον ἄρα πενθήσεις σὺ γε :

O goat, take care you don't singe your beard.

Plutarch adds, 'Fire burns *if you touch it*, but it affords light and heat.' This the Satyrs learnt, when they came to know fire better.

SIMILE 7.—*Experience fits men to instruct (340-349).*

For if a babe were born inside this grot,  
Grew to a boy here, heard us praise the sun,  
Yet had but yon sole glimmer in light's place,—  
One loving him and wishful he should learn,  
Would much rejoice himself was blinded first  
Month by month here, so made to understand  
How eyes, born darkling, apprehend amiss.

The picture here presented to us must be compared with lines 21-45. The idea which it emphasizes is, that the weakness of the teacher may become the strength of the disciple, in certain cases. You can best teach another to apprehend truths, when you yourself have gained the knowledge of those truths and of their power and value by painful experience.

SIMILE 8.—*External and Internal Evidence* (435-447).

You stick a garden-plot with ordered twigs  
 To show inside lie germs of herbs unborn,  
 And check the careless step would spoil their birth ;  
 But when herbs wave, the guardian twigs may go,  
 Since should ye doubt of virtues, question kinds,  
 It is no longer for old twigs ye look,  
 Which proved once underneath lay store of seed,  
 But to the herb's self, by what light ye boast,  
 For what fruit's signs are. *This book's fruit is plain,  
 Nor miracles need prove it any more.*

The idea here is, of course, very simple and homely. When we sow seeds in the garden, we set sticks or twigs, with or without names, to show what is below, and to warn the visitor not by hasty step to prevent the upspringing of the flowers from the hidden seed. But in due time the plants themselves grow up, reveal their identity, and are able by their presence to guard and express themselves. So the poet says that, while truth is hidden in the soul, germinating unseen,—outward signs may be needed especially to assure men of the reality and nature of the hidden germ ; but when it has developed itself such signs are needed no more, for you question the ideas themselves, perceive their value and relations ; and no external confirmation of their truth is needed ; they are their own evidence to the soul that receives them. Thus the poet would teach us, that to the mind that has received the truths of the Gospel, the question as to the miracles by which they were first proved is entirely secondary. *The truth itself is all in all.*

SIMILE 9.—*Man not a Machine*<sup>1</sup>, *charged and discharged*  
(448-451).

What? Was man made a wheelwork to wind up,  
And be discharged, and straight wound up anew?  
No!—grown, his growth lasts; taught, he ne'er forgets:  
May learn a thousand things, not twice the same.

We are not to conceive of men as mere machines—arquebuses—into which knowledge may be introduced, and thence discharged as a missive. Man receives and assimilates truth which abides with and in him; his growth is like that of a tree, continuous and organic. Nothing that is true ever passes away; it passes into maturer forms, and finds ever more adequate expression; and so in every stage and period of his development, man is acquiring *new* truths, adapted to his changing circumstances and growing powers.

SIMILE 10.—*No unnecessary help afforded: the infant.*

I say, that as the babe, you feed awhile,  
Becomes a boy and fit to feed himself,  
So, minds at first must be spoon-fed with truth:  
When they can eat, babe's nurture is withdrawn.  
I fed the babe whether it would or no:  
I bid the boy or feed himself or starve.

In this simple passage is contained the germ of much of the poem:—Revelation in its character and extent is ever adapted to the necessities and circumstances of men (St. John xvi. 25). Unnecessary aids are never given: the infant is fed, but when he is able to feed himself, he is left to do so. This is man's trial here on earth. He is left to follow out every truth reverently and patiently to its legitimate conclusion. He is to study for himself, and 'to him that hath shall be given' (1 Cor. iii. 1, 2). No robustness of religious faith would ever be attained if all

<sup>1</sup> The *ἐμψυχον ὄργανον* of Aristotle.



difficulties were eliminated ; for the period of childhood would thus be extended through all life, and the moral discipline of doubt would be lost.

SIMILE 11.—*The greatness of Life ; à fortiori of Soul* (563-566).

As life, apparent in the poorest midge,  
 (When the faint dust-speck flits, ye guess its wing)  
 Is marvellous beyond dead Atlas' self—  
 Given to the nobler midge for resting-place!

This simile, with quite marvellous brevity and directness, illustrates the value and significance of life, and by necessary consequence, of soul, especially as capable of the exercise of will and love. The minutest winged creature that flits past like a faint speck of dust, which you only infer to have a wing, is more marvellous than the vast mountain on which it alights ; so the soul has transcendent value, precisely because it is capable of Love, and from this greatness of man we rise to the conviction of the infinite greatness of Him in Whom is all might and loving will.

The whole passage recalls Pascal :—

' Man is but a reed, weakest in nature, but a reed which thinks. It needs not that the whole Universe should arm to crush him. A vapour, a drop of water is enough to kill him. But were the Universe to crush him, man would be still more noble than that which has slain him, because he knows that he dies, and that the Universe has the better of him. The Universe knows nothing of this.'

SIMILE 12.—*The Sculptor working out his Ideal* (608-614).

The statuary ere he mould a shape  
 Boasts a like gift, the shape's idea, and next  
 The aspiration to produce the same ;  
 So, taking clay, he calls his shape thereout,  
 Cries ever, ' Now I have the thing I see :'  
 Yet all the while goes changing what was wrought,  
 From falsehood like the truth, to truth itself.

The sculptor has in his mind a shape which *with his bodily eye* he has never seen. He takes clay, and models it into some rude expression and presentment of his idea, and then goes on painfully to correct and perfect the image. This is here used to illustrate the method in which man obtains spiritual knowledge. He has an idea which he is ever striving to make fully clear to himself, and rejoices in even its imperfect realization; but he goes on adding to and correcting his imperfect and indistinct notions by the aid of his daily experiences. That which was apprehended falsely or imperfectly to-day is seen more distinctly to-morrow:—

[He gets] increase of knowledge, since he learns  
Because he lives, which is to be a man,  
Set to instruct himself by his past self. (599-601.)

The progress of man then is through and by means of successive changes. What is relatively and provisionally true to-day will be felt to be false to-morrow, or rather to be only partial truth; and will give place to the higher conception. So he

Yet all the while goes changing what was wrought,  
From falsehood like the truth, to truth itself. (613, 4.)

There is something very profound in this teaching; we are bidden not to despise those who are subject to partial error, and are working their way onward and upward towards the perfect truth; and for ourselves we learn to be ever striving to rise by 'stepping-stones of our dead selves.' If a man is impatient because he has not an absolute and unerring knowledge of things, he must learn that

God only makes the live shape at a jet— (623.)

Man's creations must be tentatively and slowly wrought out:

The poet is his own best interpreter. Compare *Fifine*, lii-lix.

## APPENDIX II

### HOUSEHOLD WORDS AND AXIOMS

THERE are in Browning, perhaps more than in any poet since Shakespeare, an abundance of passages and single lines which may be taken out from their context; and which express some great idea, or present to the mind some picture, some phase of life or thought in so vivid a manner, and in such exquisitely appropriate language, that they have become familiar common-places, and are ever more and more becoming classical quotations. A few of these may well be studied, before the reader seriously tries to assimilate the philosophical teaching of the poet. We have in these some, at least, of the articles of his creed.

1. One of these, which contains the great thought of the poem, and of much of Browning's poetry, is found in lines 474-477 :—

*I say, the acknowledgment of God in Christ  
Accepted by thy reason, solves for thee  
All questions in the earth and out of it,  
And has so far advanced thee to be wise.*

The teaching plainly and powerfully expressed here is that 'the doctrine of the INCARNATION, with its corollaries, is the complete and only solution of the manifold difficult problems that confront us in the world. Christianity in its full expression provides for us a working theory, and the only possible and consistent one, of human life. Without it we should ever be inclined to say, "Why hast Thou made all men in vain?" but with its aid we learn to see man "clothed with glory and

honour": brought unto God' (2 Pet. i. 4). This is, of course, the central idea of the whole poem, as it was the great theme of the Apostle's teaching as Browning apprehended it. This is amplified in *Saul*, xvii, xviii, and in *Christmas Eve and Easter Day*.

2. The following bit, with its view of human life, taken quite apart from the general argument, is strengthening and inspiring to every one in his struggle to realize the intention of human existence:—

Our life, with all it yields of joy and woe,  
And hope and fear,—believe the aged friend,—  
Is just our chance o' the prize of learning love,  
How love might be, háth been indéed, and is. (244-8.)

The world is a school in which the great lessons to be learned are, how we are to love God and our fellow-men, how love has been manifested in Christ, and how the love of God in Christ is always, everywhere and evermore, the strength and stay of human hearts. Certainly, if viewed aright, the discipline of human life tends to teach this lesson, and we can thus dimly discern, and day by day realize more fully, that the evils (as we call them) of life are working together for the moral good of the human race.

The Holy Gospel teaches the lesson of Infinite Love: our life on earth, with its varied experiences, is given us just that we may learn it.

3. Years assist  
Which wear the thickness thin, and let man see.

Is it for nothing we grow old and weak,  
We whom God loves? When pain ends, gain ends too.

(205-7.)

This expression of the fact that age in its decay of bodily powers ought to bring a keener perception of invisible things than is possible to youth in its heyday of strength—that 'the sunset of life gives mystical lore'—has scarcely ever been more

forcibly expressed. In the noble poem of *Rabbi Ben Ezra* we have an elaborate commentary on these lines.

4. All things suffer change, save God the truth. (431.)

All life is an advance through various experiences amid the transient and mutable towards the knowledge of the Eternal and Immutable. Here, as elsewhere, we very often trace Hegel's influence on the poet's thought and expression.

5. Progress man's distinctive mark alone,  
Not God's, and not the beasts' : God is, they are,—  
Man partly is, and wholly hopes to be. (586-8.)

Again and again, in every variety of expression, and with an astonishing wealth of illustration, is this taught us in Browning's works. PROGRESS is man's law, and therefore is he left to contend with difficulties, to master doubts, and learn by the manifold of experience. This is his answer to the question often impatiently asked, 'Why is clearer evidence of truth not afforded to men?' Man is educated, exercised, trained, led on, and perfected by the very difficulties that confront him at every step. (Compare 540-548.)

6. Believe ye will not see him any more  
About the world with His divine regard! (661, 2.)

How often these words occur to one who ponders the death of any one he loves and reverences! Those who knew the poet, and recall the acute, shrewd, but entirely loving glance of the great philosopher, find it hard to realize, that in the places where he loved to be, he is no more, at least in visible presence.

## APPENDIX III

### HINTS ON THE METRE

PEOPLE are often heard to say that Browning's poetry is harsh and rugged, lacking the exquisite charm of the utterances of many other poets. Now it is certain that he possessed an exquisite ear; that he was capable of producing the most marvellous effects in rhythm and modulation; and that he had studied and mastered Greek and Latin metrical systems. It is not necessary to cite examples to prove this. Moreover, he had 'an infinite capacity for taking pains,' and therefore his lines are never carelessly constructed. We must come to the conclusion then, that into whatever form he has thrown his compositions, that form is the best adapted, in his judgement, for the effective conveyance of his ideas. It requires (and this is the thing to be insisted on) that great pains should be taken to read his lines correctly, and for this especial reason, that the conveyance by intelligent elocution of the shades of meaning, the emphasis, the connexion of ideas, is in Browning as essential to the artistic effect as good acting to a drama. The assertion may be hazarded that there is no line in this poem that will not read easily and tunefully—at least so as to harmonize with the idea—if due care be taken to ascertain its real scansion.

Much that is said here will seem to more advanced students to be childish and unnecessary, but long experience has taught the writer that nothing is too elementary for some readers of Browning. The verse then is what is called blank verse—unrhymed, ten-syllable, iambic verse. (An iambus  $\cup$  - i. e. accent on second syllable: *repent.*) Classical names for the

feet and the metre are convenient ; but, of course, mere quantity—the distinction of long and short syllables—is not in English of the essence of metre. We have to consider chiefly the accents, of which each word has one that is primary ; while, when there are more than two syllables in the word, there may be a slighter secondary metrical accent. The normal metre then would be five two-syllabled feet to each line, of which the first syllable is unaccented, and the second accented. Thus in the line

Since áll things súffer chángé | save Gód the Trúth,

we have five metrical accents which are marked. It must be noted also that each line has a pause in it : there is some place in each line where the reader may take breath. Sometimes there are two such. In classical poetry these are called caesuras, though the name is not so applicable in English. In this line the pause would naturally come after the word 'change.' It is quite necessary for a beginner to study and mark these pauses.

The next point is that to avoid monotony a foot is often introduced which is called a trochee (- ∪), consisting of an accented syllable followed by one which is unaccented ; this is often the case in the beginning of a line ; and gives what is called a choriambus (- ∪ ∪ -), an antispastic foot, very agreeable to the ear. Thus in the line

Quick, | fôr time préssés, | téll thè whóle mínd óút

the first foot is a trochee, and there are two genuine caesuras, indicated by commas. (Comp. line 45.) A trochee in the first place is found in line 248. It is also sometimes the case that there are more than ten syllables in the line, which shows that there is some foot of three syllables, or that some one syllable is to be elided. Thus in 85 either pronounce *bod*<sup>d</sup>ly, or read the *bódily párts* : where the last foot is an anapaest (∪ ∪ -) Comp. 568.

There are a few other lines in which the best way perhaps is to take two unaccented syllables together followed by two

accented, which makes what in classical works is called an Ionic-à-minore (∪ ∪ ′ ′), 569, 138.

Any difficulty in the metre indicates something in the thought or expression that needs particular attention. So in 97. The ed in (77) perished = perisht. The usage varies (138). It may be mentioned that constantly *of the* and *in the* are written *o' the* and *i' the*, and are pronounced *oth* and *ith* (lines 44, 616). With a little pains, carefully reading the lines aloud, and not satisfying ourselves till the whole flows easily, we shall arrive at the conclusion that Browning's blank verse has always a special adaptation to his subject. It is not the stately epic verse of Milton, though at times (*nay, often*) he gives us a passage that Milton might have written (119-125); much less is it the pastoral Theocritean metre of Tennyson's *Idylls*; it is a natural, familiar, almost conversational verse that rises and falls with the subject, fitly expressing it, but never diverting the mind from the sense to the mere sound. Is not this verse—as a perfectly fitting, flowing garment of the thought—colloquial, perfectly natural, but rising at times into great dignity and even sublimity—most like that of Shakespeare?

It must be noted that words which have a natural accent sometimes have not the metrical accent. Such words must not be slurred over.

Thus in 79 'dull' must have an emphasis of its own, though unaccented in the metre.

When the metrical ictus, or beat, falls on a particle, or any insignificant syllable, it is a defect—to be concealed by the reading as much as possible. Thus line 544 requires humouring. May it be read

Sómewhat to cást-off, | sómewhat tó becóme?

Browning's poetry is always strong—English to the core—and has the absolute beauty of perfect adaptation to its purpose.

THE END.



